

THE HOPE OF GLORY

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THE HOPE OF GLORY

*Education and Exhortation
in the Epistle to the Colossians*

BY

WALTER T. WILSON



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For Beth

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PREFACE

The impetus for this monograph came from an exegetical course on Colossians taught at Yale Divinity School in the Spring of 1993. During that semester, we learned together – and quickly – that this short letter contains some very challenging theology! Fortunately, students these days have practically an embarrassment of riches when it comes to scholarly evaluations of Colossians' theological themes and arguments, their likely sources, and the historical circumstances in which they developed. The more specific (and often unasked) question that I address here has to do with how the author intended this theology to engage the life of his readers in practical ways so as to direct their moral formation as Christians and as a Christian community. A basic assumption that guides the investigation of this problem is that the strategies adopted by the author in shaping his message and instructing the readers were appropriate to their historical and cultural location. Since this location was determined most concretely by Hellenistic forces, it stands to reason that we can learn something about Colossians in this regard by comparing the letter in different ways with contemporaneous Greek, Roman, and Hellenistic Jewish traditions associated with moral and spiritual education. So while the main objective is to shed light on the nature and purpose of Colossians, the study takes into consideration a fairly wide range of comparative sources, especially sources for understanding the conventions of Greco-Roman philosophic paraenesis.

Besides my students, a number of friends and colleagues have graciously helped in the production of this book through their suggestions, criticisms, and advice. I owe a particular debt of gratitude to David R. Bartlett (Yale Divinity School), Hans Dieter Betz (University of Chicago), Philip E. Devenish (First Congregational Church of Webster Groves, St. Louis), Susan R. Garrett (Louisville Presbyterian Seminary), Carl R. Holladay (Emory University), Luke Timothy Johnson (Emory University), Abraham J. Malherbe (Yale Divinity School), Wayne A. Meeks (Yale University), Petr Pokorný (Charles University), and Philip E. Turner (Berkeley Divinity School). Much welcomed financial assistance was provided by grants from the Lilly Foundation via their Junior Faculty Development Program. My research assistants, N. Shannon Planck and Stephen D. Thompson, provided expert assistance in the preparation of the list of abbreviations, bibliography, and indices. Finally, the unfailing

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REFERENCE CODES

1. SHORT TITLES

Complete bibliographical information for all materials cited in the footnotes with short titles can be found in the Bibliography (pp. 267-274).

2. TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

Texts and translations of ancient sources cited in this study are taken from the following editions, unless otherwise noted.

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Plutarch *Moralia*

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Kathleen O'Brien Wicker, ed. *Porphyry the Philosopher: To Marcella*. SBLTT 28, Graeco-Roman Religion Series 10. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987.

Pseudepigrapha

James H. Charlesworth, ed. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. 2 vols. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1985.

Pseudo-Anacharsis, Pseudo-Crates, Pseudo-Diogenes, Pseudo-Heraclitus, Pseudo-Socrates, *Socraticorum Epistulae*

Abraham J. Malherbe, et al., trans. *The Cynic Epistles: A Study Edition*. SBL SBS 12. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1977.

Seneca *Epistulae Morales*

Richard M. Gummere, trans. *Seneca: Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*. LCL. 3 vols. Cambridge: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1917-25.

Septuagint

Alfred Rahlfs, ed. *Septuaginta*. 7th ed. 2 vols. Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1962.

3. ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations for this study are taken from the "Instructions for Contributors," *JBL* 107 (1988) 579-596 and from Siegfried M. Schwertner, *IATG²: Internationales Abkürzungsverzeichnis für Theologie und Grenzgebiete* (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1992).

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
ABR	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BAGD	Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich-Danker, <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament</i>

BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BDF	Blass-Debrunner-Funk, <i>Greek Grammar of the New Testament</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BEvT	Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie
BGBE	Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BT	Bibliotheca Teubneriana
BU	Biblische Untersuchungen
BZNW	Beihefte zur <i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
EBib	Etudes Bibliques
EDNT	<i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
EKK	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar
ER	<i>Encyclopedia of Religion</i>
ETL	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i>
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
FB	Forschung zur Bibel
FBBS	Facet Books, Biblical Series
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
HTKNT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUT	Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
ITQ	<i>Irish Theological Quarterly</i>
JAC	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JRH	<i>Journal of Religious History</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement</i>
JTC	<i>Journal for Theology and the Church</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KEK	Kritisch-Exegetischer Kommentar
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LEC	Library of Early Christianity
LS	<i>Louvain Studies</i>
LSJ	Liddell-Scott-Jones, <i>Greek-English Lexicon</i>
LTP	<i>Laval Théologique et Philosophique</i>
MCS	Monographs in Classical Studies
MM	Moulton-Milligan, <i>Vocabulary of the Greek Testament</i>
MTZ	<i>Münchener theologische Zeitschrift</i>
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIDNTT	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i>
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	<i>Novum Testamentum, Supplement</i>

NTF	Neutestamentliche Forschungen
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTTS	New Testament Tools and Studies
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OCT	Oxford Classical Texts
PTMS	Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series
QD	Quaestiones Disputatae
RAC	<i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i>
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
RE	<i>Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> (Pauly-Wissowa)
RSR	<i>Recherches de Science Religieuse</i>
SBB	Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge
SBLDS	SBL Dissertation Series
SBLMS	SBL Monograph Series
SBLRBS	SBL Resources for Biblical Studies
SBL SBS	SBL Sources for Biblical Studies
SBLSP	<i>SBL Seminar Papers</i>
SBLSS	SBL Semeia Studies
SBLTT	SBL Texts and Translations
SBM	Stuttgarter biblische Monographien
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SCHNT	Studia ad Corpus Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti
SEA	<i>Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok</i>
SHR	Studies in the History of Religions
SJT	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SNT	Studien zum Neuen Testament
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SNTW	Studies of the New Testament and its World
ST	<i>Studia Theologica</i>
Str-B	Strack-Billerbeck, <i>Kommentar zum Neuen Testament</i>
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
TBAW	Tübinger Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
TextsS	Texts and Studies
TLZ	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
TRE	<i>Theologische Realenzyklopädie</i>
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
TZ	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

INTRODUCTION

There has never been much question about the value of the epistle to the Colossians as a source for theological reflection. Rather short by Pauline standards, it nevertheless conveys a richly symbolic world and a compelling message full of power and mystery. In terms of its grasp of the Christian situation, its range and depth could hardly be grander. The author paints a vast though pointed picture of God's eternal plan for the universe, centering on a mythic struggle of epic proportions. This is a struggle in which the readers themselves, like people everywhere, are caught up, and according to which they can properly consider all events and experiences for their Christian significance. Not surprisingly, special attention is paid in depicting this struggle to the figure of the protagonist, who is none other than God's anointed, Jesus Christ, in whom the grace and fullness of God dwell. Since all things were created through and for him, he occupies a place of pre-eminence eternally and in all realms of reality. He is the divine entity that binds all things together in harmony, the only being in the universe that is not in need of reconciliation with God. Accordingly, he is God's victorious agent of cosmic reconciliation, appointed to redeem a fallen and divided world, to overcome the power of death through his own death.

The main point and implication of this cosmic triumph, however, do not concern reconciliation between God and the world, but reconciliation between God and people. Moreover, God's saving purpose is not realized so much in humankind as such, but in the church, the body whose head is Christ. The letter focuses on the people of the church, who are identified as the saints, those whom God has sanctified, rescuing them from the realm of evil and darkness and delivering them to the kingdom of the beloved Son. God accomplishes this "exodus" for the saints insofar as they are "in" Christ, where they have redemption, forgiveness, and fullness. They are unified in one body, Christ's body, where they know and experience his presence. As we hear in 2.11-15, Christ's death on the cross erased the indictment of sin that stood against them. Through the spiritual power of God in baptism, they have been "made alive together with Christ." Now, as God's chosen ones, they strip off the old, sinful self and are renewed in Christ as part of God's new human creation. They set their minds on Christ, seated at the right hand of God, until he and his own are revealed in glory at the es-

chatological moment. While this new life is a reality that is meant specifically for those who belong to the body, it is by no means a life of sectarian isolation. Indeed, the church is called upon to participate actively in Christ's saving work, to live a life that manifests Christ's lordship in the world.

There is present, then, a sustained effort in Colossians to describe and prescribe a distinctively Christian understanding of human transformation, one that concentrates above all on the ramifications of this transformation for moral conduct and identity, conceived especially according to Christian ideals of community. The focus for our investigation is a critical and historical assessment of the epistle in its efforts to educate, correct, and exhort its audience so as to foster such transformation. It is clear that the author seeks to instruct the recipients as to some rather fundamental matters regarding their Christian existence and, in conjunction with this, to guide them through a particular religious crisis, one characterized by opportunity as well as uncertainty. In order to be relevant and effective in this regard, it appears that he has recourse to a number of prevailing strategies which had to do with the shaping of didactic literature in antiquity, and with the traditions of moral formation associated with such literature. Our study will suggest various ways in which the nature of Colossians as an educational and exhortatory text reflects the conventions of its time, and what implications this has for the letter's interpretation.

Colossians and its Hellenistic Context

In order to explain how the manner of Colossians' content, form, style, and so forth is familiar from such ancient conventions, we need to know something about the epistle's historical and cultural setting. By way of introduction, then, a few of the basic, distinguishing features of the era and its people – those that are germane to our investigation – can be mentioned, if only in summary form. Discussing these features gives us some preliminary insight as to the particular intellectual, religious, and literary world that Paul and the Colossians inhabited, and suggests some areas of concern for our comparative analysis.

There is no question that the world from which converts to Paul's churches came was one determined especially by the forces of Hellenism. Of special interest for us are the distinctive interpretations of their world and their place in it that Hellenistic people generally expressed, particularly insofar as these interpretations reflect certain underlying religious sensibilities. While the specifics vary con-

siderably, one basic aspect of Hellenistic religiosity that we encounter frequently in the literature of the time is the deep-seated apprehension people seem to have had regarding the nature and structure of the universe. This "Weltangst" thrived despite the apparent stability that the imperial presence of Rome was imposing on the disparate communities and cultures of the Mediterranean basin.¹ In fact, the very developments associated with empire building fueled the fire of strong centrifugal forces in Hellenistic society, as did an accompanying deterioration in the influence of the traditional deities associated with the Homeric pantheon and the Greek polis. These social and religious developments contributed to feelings of dislocation and loneliness among Hellenistic people. It seemed that the universe, in all its vastness and intricacy, was beyond human comprehension or control, being governed instead by a host of wrathful gods and indifferent supernatural powers.² Human beings could do little more than struggle against the relentless tide of "Fate."³ For them, personal and material insecurity, not to mention moral and spiritual indeterminacy, characterize the human condition, which often amounts to little more than a fruitless search for meaning that ends with death and oblivion. Divine power "was unpredictable," as Robin Lane Fox observes, "and mortals could do no more than attempt to channel its force in advance." Consequently, "a common core" of pagan religiousness is the aim "to honor the gods and avert the misfortunes which might result from the gods' own anger at their neglect." The conclusion that follows is that "[a]ny account of pagan worship which minimizes the gods' uncertain anger and mortals' fear of it is an empty account."⁴

Often abetting this "common core" was the belief that the very fabric of the universe suffered from some sort of irreparable rift. The two fundamental realms of reality that make up the universe, the celestial and the terrestrial, are set in opposition to one another on account of some cosmic crisis, variously described.⁵ One consequence

¹ For the term *Weltangst* see Horacio E. Lona, *Die Eschatologie im Kolosser- und Epheserbrief* (FB 48; Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1984) 435-441.

² On the understanding of cosmic power(s) see Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic. The Concept of Power in Ephesians in Light of its Historical Setting* (SNTSMS 63; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 41-69.

³ From numerous titles the following surveys may be mentioned: Heinrich O. Schröder, "Fatum (Heimarmene)," *RAC* 7 (1969) 524-636; David Amand, *Fatalisme et Liberté dans l'Antiquité Grecque* (Recueil de Travaux d'Histoire et de Philologie 3.19; Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1973).

⁴ Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987) 38, cf. 65, 95, 98-101, 109-123, 230-237.

⁵ There was a widespread perception in Hellenistic society that the unrighteous conduct of humanity had corrupted the cosmos; see Hans Dieter Betz, "On the

of this dislocation was that although contact between the gods and mortals was common enough, human existence was carried out essentially in isolation from its potential sources of fulfillment, which were thought to be divine in nature. As a result, in their current situation people felt themselves to be aliens and exiles, groping for personal wholeness and spiritual identity, while at the same time harboring resentment both against the human world and against human nature itself – what the Stoic thinker Seneca refers to as *displacentia sui*.⁶ In some cases, this resentment presupposes a marked dichotomy between the true self, on one hand, and the mortal body, on the other. The latter is often perceived to be an unruly and foreign entity that must be controlled, even mortified, through certain regimens of self-denial.

In response to this unsettled state of affairs, mortals sought some understanding of and access to the supernatural powers that controlled their lives, often via intermediary or daemonic beings or through mystical experiences.⁷ This would involve discovering some sort of effectual means for appeasing, worshipping, or manipulating these powers in order to obtain a degree of protection or in order to escape the corrupted, terrestrial world, either in this life or the next.⁸ And as people longed for knowledge, security, and freedom in this manner, the religious marketplace of the empire peddled an array of wares to meet their needs. Religious mediators, individuals who seemed to exhibit some degree of mastery over the maleficent forces of instability, were both numerous and highly valued.⁹ Among the more popular options proffered by such operatives were astrology, divination, magic, initiation into one or more of the mystery cults, or conversion to a philosophic school, all of which promised personal

Problem of the Religio-Historical Understanding of Apocalypticism," *JTC* 6 (1969) 134-156; on the idea of the "fall" cf. below, pp. 186-187, 198.

⁶ Seneca, *De Tranquillitate Animi* 2.10.

⁷ E.R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1967, 1970) 37 ff., 69 ff.

⁸ Hans Dieter Betz's description of the worldview assumed by the clientele of the *Papyri Graecae Magicae* would appear to be altogether representative in this context: "The people whose religion is reflected in the papyri agree that humanity is inescapably at the whim of the forces of the universe...religion is regarded as nothing but the awareness of and reaction against our dependency on the unfathomable scramble of energies coming out of the universe. In this energy jungle, human life can only be experienced as a jungle, too...Individuals seem to be nothing but marionettes at the end of power lines, pulled here and there without their knowledge by invisible forces." Hans Dieter Betz, ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation* (2nd ed.; Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1992) xlvii.

⁹ Graham Anderson, *Sage, Saint and Sophist: Holy Men and Their Associates in the Early Roman Empire* (London, New York: Routledge, 1994) 8-15, and passim.

security and salvation in one manner or another.¹⁰ Central to the appeal of most of these religious opportunities (and central to the means by which they hoped to achieve their goals) were the alternative forms of human interaction and support that they claimed to provide participants. Apparently, the diversity of Hellenistic religious phenomena developed practically to the extreme, taking on a bewildering array of individual permutations.¹¹ At all levels of society, but especially in the urban centers, there are numerous indications in this regard of religious syncretism – the mutual permeation of different religions, religious beliefs, practices, and expectations.¹² A general fascination with anything novel or exotic facilitated the openness of Hellenistic people to new forms of religious expression, especially those of eastern origin, as the popularity of Mithras, Isis, and Sarapis attests. Accordingly, the religious scene was characterized by competition, pluralism, and experimentation. As we will see, movements within Judaism and Christianity were influenced by and made accommodations to the religious life of the diversified communities that surrounded them as well. And such developments were not without their risks – or their critics – as observers of religion, especially philosophers, bemoaned the influx of foreign “superstitions,” whose practices were deemed to surpass the boundaries of what was reasonable or safe.¹³

As it penetrated the cities and towns of the eastern Mediterranean during the first century AD, the early Christian mission, known to us most intimately from the work of the apostle Paul and his associates, faced both the dangers and the opportunity of responding to these religious circumstances in a manner that was effective evangelistically while at the same time true to its own distinct theological commitments. The success of the movement, such as we are able to measure it, needs to be related to the ability of its adherents to express coherently their message within the sort of milieu sketched above. Very

¹⁰ Marcus Aurelius, *Ad Se Ipsum* 2.17 is illustrative of what Hellenistic people sought from philosophy: “Of man’s life, his time is a tiny point, his existence a flux, his sensation is clouded, his whole body’s composition swiftly corruptible, his vital spirit an eddy, his fortune hard to predict, his fame uncertain. To put it briefly: all the things of the body, a river, all the things of the spirit, dream and delirium; life a warfare and a sojourn in a strange land; and as for renown hereafter, it is oblivion. What then can be man’s escort through life? One thing only, philosophy.” Translation: R.B. Rutherford, *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius: A Study* (Oxford Classical Monographs; Oxford: Clarendon, 1989) 236, cf. 235-241.

¹¹ Lane Fox, *Pagans*, 33-36.

¹² For some representative studies see Marcel Simon, et al., *Les Syncrétismes dans les Religions Grecque et Romaine: Colloque de Strasbourg (9-11 Juin 1971)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1973).

¹³ See below, pp. 158 ff.

often the efforts of Christian evangelists, prophets, and teachers led to conflict and dispute, both within the membership of the churches themselves and between the churches and various oppositional groups.¹⁴ This in turn called forth from the Christian leadership innovative and appropriate mechanisms for resolving controversies and solidifying the commitment of their religious communities.

The epistle to the Colossians, as an official message directed (ostensibly at least) from the apostle Paul to a mission community somehow under the auspices of his movement, represents such a mechanism. The epistle imparts a fair amount of teaching intended to aid the readers' understanding of authentic Christian existence. At the same time, this instruction is presented as part of a direct and situational appeal for them to act in specific ways. This all reflects the author's intention to affect the form of religion being observed by the Colossians, who were most likely all converts to Christianity from paganism, over against specific competing influences. The author formulates this message principally through the complementary approaches of affirmation, correction, and appeal: some aspects of Christian belief and action in Colossae are affirmed, some are corrected, and throughout the text the Colossians are called upon to recognize in this affirmation and correction the substance of their faith and commitment as Christians. Thus we may speak (in fairly rudimentary terms at this point) of the epistle as an example of Christian education, polemic, and exhortation, designed to guide the progress of the readers in their Christian experience at some specific juncture in their life as a community.¹⁵

In the history of scholarship on Colossians, the didactic, exhortatory, and moral character of the letter has not been a subject of keen interest. A survey of recent literature indicates that a number of other exegetical issues has attracted the lion's share of attention. These include the ongoing question of the epistle's authorship,¹⁶ the history-of-religions crux regarding the identity of the author's opponents, the "philosophy" of 2.8,¹⁷ or the task of identifying and describing the letter's various literary sources, such as the Christ-hymn preserved in 1.15-20 and the *Haustafel* of 3.18-4.1.¹⁸ Naturally issues

¹⁴ Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1983) 111-131. A number of recent studies have focused on the Jewish-Christian dimensions of such disputes, e.g., Jack T. Sanders, *Schismatics, Sectarians, Dissidents, Deviants: The First One Hundred Years of Jewish-Christian Relations* (London: SCM, 1993) 189-200 (on Colossians), and passim.

¹⁵ See below, pp. 299 ff.

¹⁶ See below, pp. 17-22.

¹⁷ See below, pp. 28-38.

¹⁸ See below, pp. 45-47, 125-126.

arising from consideration of the text's doctrinal themes and their ongoing influence in the history of Christian thought have also been important.¹⁹ While such historical, literary, and theological studies certainly merit consideration in the wider interpretive task, and their results will often be presupposed for our investigation, the focus here is on how the letter operates as a form of religious communication from the Hellenistic world. In composing his message for the Colossians, the author has critically adopted educational strategies appropriate to his readers' background and expectations. These strategies appear to be most familiar from contemporaneous philosophic traditions, traditions which were themselves highly concerned with the tutelage of converts. For this reason, comparative analysis will serve as an important tool for examining the letter's different aspects, topics, and objectives. But before proceeding to the analysis itself, some preliminary comments regarding the character of philosophic education are in order.

Colossians and Greco-Roman Philosophy

Early Christians conducted their missionary activities within an environment entangled by the competing claims of a wide variety of religious movements. In order to attract new initiates, to instruct and edify current members, and to respond to both internal and external criticisms, many of these religious groups had developed strategies of self-presentation and communication that to some degree paralleled those current in the philosophic schools of the period. Such developments need to be understood as part of the broader effort in Greco-Roman religious life to construe the ultimate truth claims and ritual practices associated with one's group as proceeding from a sound foundation in human reason, tradition, and experience.²⁰ Conversely, the philosophic schools generally concerned themselves with questions that had religious implications, and this no doubt also facilitated the interaction of religious and philosophic thought.²¹ To the ancient mind, then, the distinction between what we would try to label "religion" and "philosophy" was not at all sharp. Hellenistic Judaism, for

¹⁹ For surveys see Eduard Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982) 245-289; Petr Pokorný, *Colossians: A Commentary* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991) 197-205; A.J.M. Wedderburn (with Andrew T. Lincoln), *The Theology of the Later Pauline Letters* (New Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 64-71.

²⁰ See, e.g., Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985) 305 ff.; Lane Fox, *Pagans*, 168 ff.

²¹ From numerous discussions mention can be made of Daniel Babut, *La Religion des Philosophes Grecs* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974).

instance, could both identify itself and appear to outsiders as a philosophic movement.²² Josephus even depicts different groups within Judaism as philosophic schools.²³ This trend in (self-)characterization reflects the increasing willingness of Jewish authors to appropriate methods and concepts in vogue among pagan thinkers.

The same could be said of the early Christians as well.²⁴ While the apostle Paul apparently did not use the term "philosophy" to describe his movement, and may have had apt reasons for not doing so, modern scholarship has nevertheless unearthed a host of ways in which the traditions of Pauline Christianity resembled those of contemporaneous Greco-Roman philosophies, borrowing from their conventions, ideas, and patterns of language.²⁵ These similarities would include but not be limited to such items as the manner of Paul's self-presentation, the form and organization of the congregations he founded, and the content and style of the apostle's correspondence with those congregations. It would appear, then, that the comparative enterprise of investigating the literature of the Pauline corpus within the context of Greco-Roman philosophy is both phenomenologically valid and well-established in the history of scholarship.²⁶ The likelihood that the opponents of the Pauline mission in Colossae formulated their religious doctrines in the form of or in conjunction with a φιλοσοφία (and the lack of any pejorative connotation attached to the term at 2.8 suggests that it was in fact their own manner of self-description) is not only consistent with trends evident in Hellenistic Judaism and early Christianity, but also raises the possibility that the Colossians may have been especially sensitive to the relationship between Christian faith and philosophic categories.

In the discussion that follows, my plan is to investigate some of these philosophic categories and conventions as a way of illustrating

²² Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* (2 vols.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1974, 1981) 1.255-261; cf. Arthur J. Droge, *Homer or Moses? Early Christian Interpretations of the History of Culture* (HUT 26; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1989) 14-15, 28-29, 45-46.

²³ Josephus, *De Bello Judaico* 2.119, *Antiquitates Judaicae* 18.11.

²⁴ In addition to the titles that follow in nn. 25 and 26, see Edwin A. Judge, "The Early Christians as a Scholastic Community," *JRH* 1 (1960) 4-15, 125-137; Robert L. Wilken, "Collegia, Philosophical Schools, and Theology," *The Catacombs and the Colosseum: The Roman Empire as the Setting of Primitive Christianity* (ed. Stephen Benko and John J. O'Rourke; Valley Forge: Judson, 1971) 268-278; Droge, *Homer*, 65-72, 162-167, 197-198.

²⁵ For discussion and bibliography see Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 81-84; Abraham J. Malherbe, "Hellenistic Moralists and the New Testament," *ANRW* II.26.1 (1992) 267-270.

²⁶ Representative of such efforts are the essays in Troels Engberg-Pedersen, ed., *Paul in his Hellenistic Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

the character of the epistle to the Colossians as an instance of early Christian exhortation and moral guidance. To be sure, any assessment of moral philosophy during the Hellenistic age is confronted with a staggering amount of diversity in terms of thought, approach, and structure. The objective here is not to survey the entire landscape, but rather to focus in a very selective manner on specific strategies that seem to approximate those evident in the letter. In this way, we should come to an improved understanding of how the author tries to communicate with and move the readers and how they may have interpreted these efforts.

While it is true that both historically and ideologically the interests of the Greco-Roman philosophies diverged considerably, we can at least approach them in a general way for introductory purposes, even at the risk of a certain amount of over-simplification.²⁷ To begin with, philosophers tended to view the human condition as one that was fundamentally impaired by ignorance, vice, and weakness. Their interpretation of the nature of this problem varied, depending on the specific anthropological assessments of the different schools. Such assessments were in agreement functionally, however, insofar as they helped to justify the role of the philosopher in society as a critic and reformer.²⁸ Typically, the response of a philosophic school to the human condition consisted of sustained attempts to overcome this plight through a process of personal education and training that would in some fashion facilitate self-knowledge and self-actualization. The ideational basis of such a program would be located in a rational and systematic exposition of the school's doctrines, which would ordinarily touch upon such matters as the origin of the cosmos, the nature of deity, and speculations regarding the after-life. But by far the most prominent concern of a philosophic program would be evident in efforts to realize doctrinal assumptions concretely by putting them into practice through appropriate personal conduct. Such conduct was usually related in some fashion to the cultivation of moral virtue or excellence, ἀρετή, which was often classified according to a number of cardinal and subordinate virtues.²⁹ The purpose of the

²⁷ For a survey of the prominent authors and texts see Giovanni Reale, *A History of Ancient Philosophy, Volume IV: The Schools of the Imperial Age* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990); Reale emphasizes in the historical trends evident in Hellenistic philosophy a movement away from a materialistic vision of reality and the search for a secular *eudaimonia*, and towards a cognition of the superiority of the transcendent realms, to which humans aspire to be united.

²⁸ For instance, Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 13.13-16; Epictetus, *Diatribae* 2.13.5 ff.

²⁹ Walter T. Wilson, *The Mysteries of Righteousness: The Literary Composition and Genre of the Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides* (TSAJ 40; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1994) 42-59.

philosopher in this context was to explain for the novice how one ought to live according to the teachings of the school and then to make such a life possible.

Consequently, the language of individual reform and reorientation often shapes philosophic discourse. The philosophic movement promises initiates an experience that will "purify," "cure," and "heal" them of their previous, corrupted condition, capacitating an authentic form of life, one that is in some manner congruent with ultimate reality.³⁰ Because the philosophic school prescribes a specific type of personal moral "turning," often some type of new social context corresponding to and fostering this transformation is promoted. At a minimum, this would consist of the new relationship between the neophyte and the philosopher, who would serve as his or her mentor. Beyond this, sometimes the social circle appropriate for guidance within the program of a school included also secondary instructors, tutors, and fellow students, and within certain movements entailed also living in a special, closed community of adherents.³¹ It is within this context that we can appropriately speak of these disparate philosophies as "schools" with "teachers" and "students," though we should bear in mind the significant variety evidenced by these movements as to institutional arrangements, channels of authority, and the transmission of set bodies of teaching, as well as the significant ways in which ancient educational institutions differed from their modern counterparts.³²

In the light of these observations, it comes as no surprise that each school devised its own special strategies for the indoctrination of new members. Training of this sort could be variously described by terms such as *ἄσκησις*, *γυμνάζειν*, *μελέτη*, *ψυχαγωγία*, or *ἐπιμέλεια τῆς ψυχῆς*.³³ It also appears that different pedagogical approaches and different types of training could be adopted within any one movement. Students, for example, would be required to listen to lectures, to meditate on key points of doctrine, to receive counseling from their superiors, or to develop self-control by observing a new, more disciplined regimen. Such strategies for advancement would be tailored according to the experience, ability, temperament, and psychological condition of individual students. One pedagogical strategy

³⁰ See below, pp. 54-55, 89 ff.

³¹ See below, pp. 85-86.

³² See further Henri I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (London, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956); M.L. Clarke, *Higher Education in the Ancient World* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971).

³³ Benjamin L. Hijmans, *Ἀσκησις: Notes on Epictetus' Educational System* (Assen: van Gorcum, 1959) 55-63, 70-72.

that seems to have cut across all boundaries was the practice among students of reading, and here we come to the critical place of literary texts in philosophic education.

The basic interests evident in the literary activity of the schools included the preservation of traditional materials, communicating with members of the group who were far-off, facilitating the students' memorization of philosophic doctrines, disseminating the ideology of the movement to outsiders, and so forth. Correspondingly, a host of different literary genres thrived within the schools, depending on their specific needs. We encounter, for example, such forms as protreptic speeches,³⁴ epitomes,³⁵ anthologies,³⁶ and advice.³⁷ Especially germane for our investigation of Colossians is that mode of philosophic discourse intended for students that was associated with moral exhortation. This form of literature, generally known as paraenesis, has been the subject of numerous modern studies on all sorts of ancient texts.³⁸ It represents a basis for our investigation of Colossians as well, though any understanding of this text as demonstrating paraenetic features must take into account its many distinctive characteristics.³⁹ Before examining Colossians within the context of philosophic paraenesis, though, a few preliminary caveats and a definition are in order.

First, it should be emphasized that the practice of delivering paraenesis was a wide-ranging and cross-cultural phenomenon in antiquity. While it is possible to extrapolate from the many instances of ancient paraenetic communication some underlying features, few of these features are necessarily present in any given example of paraenesis. Thus diversity seems to be the rule in analyzing such materials. We must allow for a significant degree of imprecision on the part of both ancient and modern writers when it comes to describing paraenetic texts. Second, and following from this, in exhorting their readers regarding some subject of moral concern, the authors of an-

³⁴ Simon R. Slings, *A Commentary on the Platonic Clitophon* (Amsterdam: Academische Pers, 1981) 70-183.

³⁵ Wilson, *Mysteries*, 184-199.

³⁶ Walter T. Wilson, *Love Without Pretense: Romans 12.9-21 and Hellenistic-Jewish Wisdom Literature* (WUNT 2.46; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1991) 68-81.

³⁷ Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (HUT 28; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1991) 21-23, 50-53.

³⁸ For overview and bibliography see Benjamin Fiore, "Paraenesis and Protreptic," *ABD* 5 (1992) 162-165.

³⁹ For the identification of Colossians as paraenesis cf. Walter Bujard, *Stilanalytische Untersuchungen zum Kolosserbrief als Beitrag zur Methodik von Sprachvergleichen* (SUNT 11; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973) 117-121; Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 126; Pokorny, *Colossians*, 5, 26.

cient paraenetic texts make use of a series of different literary forms and styles and carry out their work in a range of settings. This fact not only suggests the literary and rhetorical versatility of paraenesis, but should also encourage us as modern analysts to think of paraenesis not simply as a form of literature but especially as a particular *modus operandi* of literary communication associated with moral instruction and motivation. Third, ancient paraenesis was not exclusively or even distinctively a philosophic type of discourse. Indeed, the practices of paraenetic communication (depending on how they are defined) seem to have belonged to many different literary traditions in antiquity. It might be fair to say that Greco-Roman philosophers borrowed this mode of communication from the prevailing culture, adjusting and refining it according to their own criteria. In the investigation of Colossians, it appears that the most useful comparative materials come from the corpus of philosophic paraenesis, though we should remember that this corpus reflects only one portion of the entire spectrum of ancient paraenesis.

With these caveats in mind, we might define ancient philosophic paraenesis as a teacher's commendation, through moral exhortation, instruction, and correction, of a prescribed way of life to individuals who are at a novice or liminal stage of development within their philosophic group. This manner of address is delivered within the framework of a previously-shaped and comprehensive understanding of reality that derives from the movement's particular teachings. Owing to the fact that this "worldview" is all-encompassing in nature, its interpretation and application in a paraenetic context necessarily take into account, at some level, matters of ultimate concern, including pivotal issues of a religious or theological nature. Because the recipients of paraenesis find themselves at a cross-roads, both in life and in terms of their training within the school, the formulation of paraenesis will take into account facets of prior and competing worldviews, which possess their own agendas for human thriving. Since it is oriented towards the personal formation and palpable moral progress of students, paraenesis exhibits a clear persuasive interest, as it seeks to shape the concrete behavior and decision-making processes of neophytes so that every aspect of their lives corresponds with and verifies the teachings to which they subscribe. The success of paraenesis in this regard depends in no small part upon the ability of the author to establish himself as a moral authority, guide, and mentor for the readers as they identify and overcome specific obstacles.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ In accordance with this definition, philosophic paraenesis can be distinguished from other varieties and manners of moral exhortation (despite numerous similari-

Unfortunately, philosophic paraenesis is accessible to us today only in written form, though in antiquity it occurred primarily in non-written forms, and the latter must have exercised no small influence on the shape and style of the former. As for these written examples, paraenesis relies fundamentally upon the address of the author to the readers by means of direct speech. Paraenesis as a mode of communication is not narrative or poetic by nature, though (as we will learn) it can incorporate certain narrative and poetic elements. The conversational quality of paraenesis becomes especially pronounced when it is conveyed in epistolary forms, where it generally takes on the trappings of a real personal exchange.⁴¹ As a category of direct speech or discourse, then, the primary components of a paraenetic text can be described according to the different groups of people involved in the exchange, and these in turn can be distinguished according to how the speaker, the author of the text, refers to them. Put most simply, we can identify three types of characters that figure prominently in the paraenetic act of communication.⁴² First, we have the individual(s) referred to in the *first-person*, that is, the author, the one who delivers the speech and determines its content and destination. Second, there are those individuals who are referred to by the author in the *second-person*, the group that receives and responds to the paraenetic message. Third, in what is normally the most diversified group, we have those individuals who are referred to by the author in the *third-person*, whose actions and opinions help make up the substance of the message, relating in some meaningful way to the paraenetic conversation between the author and the recipients.

Because they are fundamental to all examples of paraenetic discourse, and because they encompass all the different figures that might play a role in a paraenetic text, these three categories or components provide us with a simple, yet appropriate framework for organizing a comparative analysis. For our interpretation of each of these items in the case of the paraenetic speech of Colossians, we must rely entirely upon the letter itself for relevant data. We are unable, for example, to analyze the author as an historical personage, but must describe how the letter-writer presents "Paul" (that is, how

ties), such as the speech of a general to his troops (e.g., Dio Cassius, *Historiae Romanae* 50.16-30), or exhortation that is philosophic in content and nature but intended for the general public (e.g., Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 32), or discourse intended to induce conversion to philosophy (e.g., Plato's *Euthydemus*), or philosophic advice appropriate to other stations in life (e.g., Plutarch, *Coniugalia Praecepta*).

⁴¹ See below, pp. 48-49.

⁴² Cf. Pokorny, *Colossians*, 28-31.

the letter-writer presents himself or herself in the persona of someone else) through literary means. In the chapters that follow, I discuss each of these three categories in Colossians individually and from the vantage point of ancient practices of moral guidance, especially those associated with philosophic paraenesis. Chapter Two attends to the author's manner of self-presentation. Chapter Three focuses on the characterization of the recipients. Chapter Four examines the function of "third-person" referents who play significant roles in the text in terms of both the letter's epistolary situation and the content of its message; these referents are God, Christ, and the adherents of the Colossian "philosophy." Chapters Five and Six then probe ways in which the letter-writer has synthesized these various categories in a coherent manner: the former reconstructs the worldview presumed by the text, the comprehensive, symbolic, and storied explanation of reality which the audience is to realize in its Christian praxis, while the latter investigates how the pertinent aspects of this worldview take shape as formal communication, taking into account the epistle's literary composition, genre, and argumentative qualities. The Conclusion suggests some implications of the study for our interpretation of Colossians as both an historical and moral document, as an instance of ancient practical theology that endeavors to articulate and actualize a distinct interpretation of Christian reality. Before proceeding directly to the comparative analysis, however, it is necessary to spell out some basic interpretive assumptions that will be made throughout the book regarding the letter itself, the reasons why it was written, and the special features of its historical setting.

CHAPTER ONE

COLOSSIANS AND ITS HISTORICAL SETTING

The success of the epistle to the Colossians in fostering among its intended readers an informed and active understanding of Christian existence must have depended in no small part on the letter-writer's ability to speak appropriately and aptly to their particular historical, cultural, and religious situation. This situation would have owed something to the Colossians' general expectations as people shaped and surrounded by Hellenistic culture. It also would have owed something to their aspirations and concerns as a local Christian church. Since our comparative study of Colossians as paraenesis is guided by historical considerations and depends upon a particular understanding of the epistle's historical location, it is necessary to describe that location as a preliminary topic for investigation, tending to the various literary, religious, rhetorical, and ecclesial contingencies that accompanied its writing and reception. Analysis of these problems is especially important in the case of Colossians since contemporary scholarship has yet to achieve certainty even with regard to basic questions about the letter, such as who wrote it, for whom was it written, to what situation was it meant to respond, and what type (or genre) of letter it represents. For our purposes, discussion of these questions can be conveniently divided into two categories. First, some comments are in order regarding the historical circumstances of the epistolary exchange assumed by the text. This concerns questions of authorship, intended recipients, and purpose. Second, it is also necessary to introduce the letter itself, its basic characteristics as an ancient Christian text, especially one that exhibits a strong moral interest. As a caveat for what follows, it should be emphasized that the information pertinent to addressing these issues is far from complete, and so in most cases only tentative proposals are possible.

Audience, Author, Circumstances

The first matter concerns what can be ascertained about the letter's addressees. According to Colossians 1.2, the author intends the epistle for "the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colossae." This refers to the city of Colossae, located on the banks

of the Lycus River in southern Phrygia. As early as the fifth century BC, Colossae was a noteworthy industrial and commercial center, situated on a major highway that linked the interior of Asia Minor with western seaports such as Ephesus and Miletus. In the centuries that followed, the culture of the city, as well as that of its environs, became increasingly Hellenized, and its population increasingly diverse, consisting primarily of Phrygians, Galatians, and Greeks, along with a sizable Jewish presence.¹ The religious scene of the region seems to have been similarly variegated; an array of cults and movements thrived in Phrygia, sometimes merging with or borrowing from one another.² Apparently, even members of the Jewish community were not completely immune from some willingness to assimilate to the prevailing, Hellenized culture.³ The citizens of the region surrounding Colossae were no strangers to the influences of Greco-Roman philosophy either. Nearby Hierapolis, for example, was celebrated in antiquity as the birthplace of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus (ca. 50-117 AD).⁴

Despite its vigorous past, there are indications that by the time the earliest Christians reached the city of Colossae its size and importance had diminished. Meanwhile, the two other urban areas of the Lycus River valley, Laodicea and Hierapolis, prospered and grew considerably, upstaging their older neighbor. When a major earthquake devastated the area in 60-61 AD, Laodicea and Hierapolis quickly built up, while (evidently) Colossae struggled in obscurity for some years afterwards.⁵ It is probably significant for interpretation that both Laodicea and Hierapolis are mentioned in the letter to the Colossians itself as centers of the Pauline mission (2.1, 4.13, 15-16).⁶ The proximity of these cities to Colossae, together with the directive of 4.16 that the addressees should exchange letters with the church of the Laodiceans, indicate that the author intended his message for a broader audience than that specified by 1.2. The projected scope

¹ On the ancient city of Colossae and the Jewish population there see Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 8-9, with references; also Clinton E. Arnold, "Colossae," *ABD* 1 (1992) 1089-1090. Paul R. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (SNTSMS 69; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) contains relevant information but no specific discussion of Colossae.

² Ralph P. Martin, *Colossians and Philemon* (NCBC; 3rd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973) 4-5.

³ Wedderburn, *Theology*, 9-11; cf. Arnold, *Ephesians*, 29-34.

⁴ F.F. Bruce, "Hierapolis," *ABD* 3 (1992) 194-196.

⁵ Lohse, *Colossians*, 8-9; Schweizer, *Colossians*, 13-14.

⁶ Revelation 3.14-22 also indicates the ongoing importance of Laodicea in the region as a Christian center; cf. Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting* (JSNTSup 11; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986) 178-209.

of Colossians must have encompassed the Christian communities in these two cities and perhaps also those Christians in the Lycus River region as a whole.⁷ Thus we appear to have here the earliest surviving example of a "general" or "encyclical" letter to be included in the Pauline corpus.⁸

Some modern critics have even gone beyond this line of interpretation, proposing that the devastation of 60-61 AD virtually obliterated the Christian community in Colossae, and so the writer's primary audience could not have been residing in that municipality at all. Rather, references in the text such as those listed above were included by the (post-Pauline) author of Colossians as part of a literary subterfuge. Such remarks, together with general knowledge of the earthquake, would explain to the true intended recipients – the Christians in Laodicea and perhaps elsewhere in the region – why a copy of the "letter to the Colossians" had surfaced in their communities somewhat belatedly.⁹ With Colossae in ruins, no one would be available to question the validity of the epistle as an authentic product of the apostle. The pseudepigrapher's hope, we can imagine, would have been for the Laodicean Christians to recognize in Paul's words for the Colossians (presumably written some years earlier) counsel that was meaningful for the situation currently confronting them. In this case at least some of the individuals mentioned by the writer in 4.7-17 would have been familiar especially to the community in Laodicea (and perhaps also Hierapolis) rather than that in Colossae.¹⁰ Such a scenario, if at all accurate, might help to explain what commentators see as the generalized or typical nature of some of the advice, descriptions, and warnings conveyed by the letter.¹¹ (While we would do well to keep these remarks in mind, it will still be convenient to refer to the original readership of the letter as the "Colossians" and the "Colossian community.")

This leads to the second set of questions, which concerns the text's authorship, an issue that is closely related also to the problem of dating the epistle. A consensus has developed and continues to grow in

⁷ Lohse, *Colossians*, 181-183; Pokorny, *Colossians*, 20-21.

⁸ Cf. below, pp. xxx.

⁹ According to this theory, the letter to the Laodiceans in 4.16 would be part of the literary artifice; on this "text" see John B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1879, 1955) 274-300.

¹⁰ Andreas Lindemann, "Die Gemeinde von 'Kolossä': Erwägungen zum 'Sitz im Leben' eines pseudopaulinischen Briefes," *Wort und Dienst*, N.F. 16 (1981) 122-134; idem, *Der Kolosserbrief* (Zürcher Bibelkommentare 10; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1983) 12-13; Pokorny, *Colossians*, 20-21.

¹¹ Cf., e.g., Lohse's (*Colossians*, 181) comment that the author's intent "was to paint a typical picture of the life of a Christian community."

modern scholarship that challenges the traditional view of Pauline authorship that the letter claims for itself (1.1, 23, 4.18).¹² The arguments of those who support this position derive largely from considerations of the distinctive vocabulary, style, and theology that the text appears to exhibit in comparison with those letters of undisputed Pauline authorship. In the eyes of many scholars, the number and nature of the differences in Colossians vis-à-vis what can be safely said to be characteristically Pauline make it unlikely, even impossible, that this letter could have been composed by the apostle, at least in the sense that we ordinarily conceive of authorship.

In examining the types of differences detected in Colossians by modern scholarship, it is important to note that these differences appear throughout the document and are not concentrated in any particular section. There seem to be three major areas for consideration. To begin with, Colossians contains a large number of terms that are absent from the undisputed correspondence, while it seemingly omits characteristically Pauline expressions, even when such terms would be appropriate to the subject at hand.¹³ In conjunction with this, the author's style of writing exhibits some unexpected features, such as a predilection for long, complicated sentences, pleonasm, epexegetical genitives, participles, and relative clauses. In his exhaustive study of such linguistic and stylistic peculiarities, Walter Bujard concludes that a fundamental distinction can be recognized in the *Gedankenführung* of this writing, which is more "associative" and less "argumentative" in nature than what we find in Paul's correspondence.¹⁴

Second, while it is obvious that the author of Colossians presumes many of the leading features of Pauline theology and endeavors to present a message that is recognizable within the context of that theology, throughout the epistle we witness the reshaping of Paul's thought at key junctures.¹⁵ Colossians develops, for instance, the cos-

¹² Johannes Lähnemann, *Der Kolosserbrief: Komposition, Situation und Argumentation* (SNT 3; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1971) 12-28; Mark Kiley, *Colossians as Pseudo-epigraphy* (The Biblical Seminar 4; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986) 38 ff.; Wolfgang Schenk, "Der Kolosserbrief in der neueren Forschung (1945-1985)," *ANRW* II.25.4 (1987) 3327-3338.

¹³ In addition to the references in the next note see Heinrich J. Holtzmann, *Kritik der Epheser- und Kolosserbriefe* (Leipzig: Wilhelm Engelmann, 1872) 104-129; Ernst Percy, *Die Probleme der Kolosser- und Epheserbriefe* (Lund: Gleerup, 1946) 16-66.

¹⁴ Bujard, *Stilanalytische Untersuchungen*, 129, 201, 214, 220; cf. Wolfgang Schenk, "Christus, das Geheimnis der Welt, als dogmatisches und ethisches Grundprinzip des Kolosserbriefes," *EvT* 43 (1983) 138-139; Kiley, *Colossians*, 51-59.

¹⁵ For what follows see esp. Lohse, *Colossians*, 177-183; Pokorny, *Colossians*, 126-133; Helmut Merklein, "Paulinische Theologie in der Rezeption des Kolosser- und Epheserbriefes," *Studien zu Jesus und Paulus* (WUNT 43; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr

mic and universal dimensions of its christology more fully than Paul did. Its author replaces the apostle's proclamation of the Christ-event as a victory over such mythical foes as sin, death, and the law with an exposition of Christ's triumph over mythical forces of another ilk, the cosmic powers and authorities (for example, 2.14-15). Similarly, the Christian ἐκκλησία designates not only a local house-church – a meaning that the term consistently retains in the Pauline corpus – but also the church as a universal institution (1.18, 24), the body of which Christ is the “head” (κεφαλή), a metaphorical interpretation that represents another new development.

Critics detect also in Colossians a changed view of baptism, the ritual act by which individuals are initiated into the church and enter the body of Christ. In typically Pauline fashion, the author of Colossians asserts that in baptism the readers – insofar as they are “in” Christ – have died and been buried with Christ. He adds, however, going a crucial step beyond Paul's formulations, that in baptism they have also been raised with Christ from the dead (2.12, 13, 20, 3.1, 3). This shift has far-reaching implications for the understanding in Colossians of Christian existence, to the extent that the nature of this existence is understood to be consistent with the event (baptism) that initiated it.¹⁶ To illustrate: the letter-writer construes the consequence of the baptizand's participation in Christ's death and resurrection in terms of the forgiveness of sins (ἡ ἄφεσις τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν)¹⁷ rather than in terms of the forensic category of justification from faith such as we know from Pauline works like Galatians or Romans.¹⁸ In conjunction with this, Colossians underscores the present fullness of salvation for the believer. The “hope” to which individuals adhere as Christians directs itself primarily not towards a future judgment and fulfillment executed by God through Christ, but towards the realization of the decisive changes that have already occurred in their lives and, parallel with this, towards a present reality centered on the exalted, heavenly Christ, who has already accomplished for the elect all that is necessary for their salvation.¹⁹

[Paul Siebeck], 1987) 409-447; Rudolf Hoppe, *Der Triumph des Kreuzes: Studien zum Verhältnis des Kolosserbriefes zur paulinischen Kreuzestheologie* (SBB 28; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1994) 12-35, 261-264, and passim.

¹⁶ Lona, *Eschatologie*, 147-172.

¹⁷ Colossians 1.14, cf. 2.13, 3.13.

¹⁸ Roy Yates, “A Reappraisal of Colossians,” *ITQ* 58 (1992) 103; Yates argues that this difference “represents a view of the relationship of God to man which carries the strongest moral overtones and points to a background which involved moral behavior.” This results in and requires on the part of the author the task of addressing the elect (i.e., the readers) in terms of more specific, more detailed moral instruction; cf. idem, *The Epistle to the Colossians* (London: Epworth, 1993) xxiv.

¹⁹ Merklein, “Paulinische Theologie,” 424-435; Schenk, “Christus,” 150; idem,

Consequently, spatial concepts exercise greater influence over the author's eschatological reflections than those we find in the undisputed letters, and they do so at the expense of concrete and typically Pauline expectations that the future will bring anything fundamentally new, rather than a revelation of what already exists but is presently "hidden" or invisible.

Third, these sorts of transformations of the apostolic gospel correspond also with the presentation in the letter of the one who articulates this theology, Paul himself. Colossians wants to present the activity and importance of the apostle as being broader, more unique, and more authoritative for the life of the church than anything we know that Paul claimed for himself. The writer of the epistle manifests this variance most strikingly in the daring assertion of 1.24, that "I fill up the deficiencies of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh" for the sake of the church.²⁰ Apparently, in the worldview of the author and the readers it is Paul alone who is qualified or capacitated to assume the role indicated by this claim. Looking at the document as a whole, the person of the apostle and his sanctioned teaching (as opposed, say, to Christian proclamation guided by the Spirit of God) emerge in a normative capacity more distinctly than in any of the undisputed letters.²¹ Christian faith in this context takes on the sense of *fides quae creditur*. As Petr Pokorný observes,

[i]t is noteworthy that the objective meaning of the concept of faith becomes prominent in the formulations of faith handed down by tradition (1.23, 2.7, cf. Ephesians 4.5) and that the apostle considers his task to be that of teaching (διδάσκειν) rather than proclamation (κηρύσσειν, as in Rom, 1 & 2 Cor, Gal, 1 Thess). Proclamation is already a matter of the past (1.23).²²

To sum up: while it is possible that some of the differences outlined above may be due to the author's interaction with the "philosophy" or with traditional (non-Pauline) materials, it seems prudent to conclude (with the majority of scholars) that in Colossians we encounter an unknown author, an individual who takes advantage of the very common device in Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian literature of pseudonymity.²³ According to this interpretation, the letter can be

"Kolossierbrief," 3347; Peter Müller, *Die Anfänge der Paulusschule: dargestellt am zweiten Thessalonicherbrief und am Kolossierbrief* (ATANT 74; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1988) 67-83; Wedderburn, *Theology*, 59-60.

²⁰ For analysis of this verse see below, pp. 74-77.

²¹ Martinus C. de Boer, "Images of Paul in the Post-Apostolic Period," *CBQ* 42 (1980) 364; Charles M. Nielsen, "The Status of Paul and his Letters in Colossians," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 12 (1985) 107-109.

²² Pokorný, *Colossians*, 13; Pokorný adds that in Colossians faith "is virtually identical with the catechetical passing on of doctrine;" see 1.4-5, 23, 2.5, 7.

²³ See below, pp.49-50, 64-65.

understood as the effort of a disciple or associate of Paul, perhaps Timothy, Epaphras, Tychicus, or Onesimus – someone who was well-versed in Paul's thought and praxis, someone who had access to at least one of his letters,²⁴ and someone who was participating in the ongoing apostolic mission in Asia Minor.²⁵ Some modern interpreters in this camp have postulated for the document's genesis the activity of a Pauline "school" of some sort, most likely headquartered in Ephesus, though precious little information is available regarding the operation (let alone existence) of such institutions in early Christianity.²⁶ At any rate, given the importance of Ephesus for the history of the Pauline movement, that city remains our best guess as to the origin of the letter, though this issue seems to be of relatively minor interpretive importance. (Despite this decision as to the authorship of Colossians, it will still be convenient to refer to "Paul" as the writer and to "his" letter.)

Judging from the letter itself, the purpose of this unknown writer was to bring the authority and teaching of the apostle to bear in a manner that was both appropriate to the situation of the churches in the Lycus River valley and consistent with his own interpretation of the Pauline gospel. Clearly this interpretation differed from that of Paul himself. One possible aspect of this contrast appears inasmuch as with Colossians we encounter a mind whose orientation and outlook were more steeped in the ways of the pagan world than that of the apostle.²⁷ In such an historical context, the letter addresses, at least in essence, the dilemma of a sort of "power vacuum" left in the wake of Paul's absence (his final imprisonment) and death, with the accompanying uncertainties regarding order and authority within

²⁴ An analysis of Colossians 4.7-18 in comparison with the names mentioned in Paul's letter to Philemon also tends to support the deutero-Pauline origin of the former; it seems that the author of Colossians has lifted these names from the authentic letter (which apparently was also sent to a city in the Lycus River valley) in order to make his own composition appear more apostolic; see Lohse, *Colossians*, 175-177; Joachim Gnllka, "Das Paulusbild im Kolosser- und Epheserbrief," *Kontinuität und Einheit: Für Franz Mußner* (ed. Paul-Gerhard Müller and Werner Stenger; Freiburg: Herder, 1981) 181-184; Yates, *Colossians*, xxv-xxvii. In addition, E.P. Sanders ("Literary Dependence in Colossians," *JBL* 85 [1966] 28-45) suggests that the author's manner of interacting with other Pauline materials proves the letter to be pseudepigraphical.

²⁵ For various theories as to authorship see the commentaries, also Lähnemann, *Kolosserbrief*, 177-182; Gnllka, "Paulusbild," 185-186; Wolf-Henning Ollrog, *Paulus und seine Mitarbeiter: Untersuchungen zu Theorie und Praxis der paulinischen Mission* (WMANT 50; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1979) 219-233, 236-242.

²⁶ For discussion and literature see Ollrog, *Mitarbeiter*, 114-118, 219-221, 227-231; Kiley, *Colossians*, 91-103; Joachim Gnllka, *Der Kolosserbrief* (HTKNT 10.1; Freiburg: Herder, 1980) 21-23; Müller, *Anfänge*, 270 ff.

²⁷ Wedderburn, *Theology*, 13, 21-22, 61.

the gentile churches founded under the auspices of his mission.²⁸

With regard to date, given the relative proximity of the thought expressed by Colossians to that of Paul in comparison with most of the other disputed New Testament letters, and the fact that the text almost certainly served as a principal source for the author of the epistle known to us as "Ephesians,"²⁹ a date of composition sometime in the 70s or 80s of the first century would be a reasonable conjecture.

A third set of questions concerns the circumstances that accompanied the composition of the epistle, which relates also to the topic of the historical background of the Colossian churches. Here the modern interpreter must rely almost exclusively on the letter itself for pertinent information. The text indicates that Paul never visited the region and assumes no history of first-hand contact between the ostensible author and the ostensible readership.³⁰ Lacking are any specific allusions that derive from actual shared experiences between Paul and the Colossian Christians, the sort of references that figure so prominently in an authentic letter like I Thessalonians. Thus, by and large, the tone of the document is rather impersonal and aloof, and at a number of junctures its discernible reach of application seems to be rather broad. The only personal information directly communicated by the epistle concerning Paul is that he is imprisoned (4.3, 10, 18).³¹

By contrast, the letter's references to Epaphras, which serve in part to endorse his role as an authentic bearer of the apostolic gospel, suggest that he was the first missionary to evangelize the area and that he was among the earliest leaders of the Christian movement there.³² The epistle plainly assumes that this operation was conducted under the authority of Paul, or at least with his approval and support, as part of the larger Pauline mission to Asia Minor. Most likely, the initial evangelistic work guided by Epaphras in the Lycus River valley was carried out during the period of Paul's apostolic activity centered in Ephesus, some 100 miles to the west, circa 52-55 AD.³³ By the time of the writing of the letter to the Colossians,

²⁸ Nielsen, "The Status of Paul," 114.

²⁹ On the relation between Colossians and Ephesians see Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians* (AB 34B; New York: Doubleday, 1994) 72-114; cf. Helmut Merklein, "Eph 4,1—5,20 als Rezeption von Kol 3,1-17," in Müller and Stenger, *Kontinuität*, 194-210.

³⁰ See Colossians 1.4, 8, 2.1, 5, 4.7-9.

³¹ Cf. Colossians 1.24, 4.7-9.

³² Florence M. Gillman, "Epaphras," *ABD* 2 (1992) 533.

³³ Cf. Acts 19.1-41; Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (WBC 44; Waco: Word, 1982) xxvii-xxx; Ollrog, *Mitarbeiter*, 41-52; Jürgen Becker (*Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles*

though, perhaps some twenty or thirty years later, Epaphras, like Paul, is absent, with no specific explanation offered as to his whereabouts or circumstances.³⁴ The author identifies Epaphras as a native of the area, and describes him in honorific terms as “a slave of Christ” and “a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf,” who “always strives in his prayers” and “works tirelessly” for the congregations in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis, in a manner not unlike that of Paul himself (1.7, 4.12-13, cf. 1.9, 28-29, 2.1).³⁵ Colossians 1.6-8 suggests something of the twofold function that must have been integral to Epaphras’ ministry in the region. On one hand, the writer reminds the readers that “you learned” (ἐμάθετε) the gospel from Epaphras, which entails hearing and understanding the grace of God in truth. In this capacity, Epaphras is a missionary and minister who proclaims, teaches, and explicates to the community the Christian message. On the other hand, and in conjunction with this ministry, Epaphras afterwards reported (δηλώσας)³⁶ to Paul concerning the life and the conduct of the new churches, informing him specifically of their love in the Spirit, which they have for all the saints (cf. 1.4). Thus Epaphras bonds the community and the gospel it heeds with the apostle and, through him, with the other churches of the Pauline mission. He serves as an essential link in the apostolic chain of command and as an assurance of the legitimacy of its teaching.³⁷ It appears that other individuals known to the readers and cited in the epistle, specifically Tychicus and Archippus, fulfill leadership roles within the community that function in comparable ways.

What can be said regarding the character of the community itself? Remarks such as those found in 1.12, 21, 27, 2.13, 3.5-7, and 4.11 suggest that the Christians being addressed are predominantly or even exclusively converts from paganism.³⁸ In terms of its gentile

[Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993] 154-156, 184) speculates that Paul visited Laodicea during this time.

³⁴ Colossians 1.7 and 4.12 may imply knowledge on the author’s part that Epaphras is incarcerated at the time that the letter is being written, though these references may be based rather on Philemon 23.

³⁵ Cf. Franz Zeilinger, “Die Träger der apostolischen Tradition im Kolosser-brief,” *Jesus in der Verkündigung der Kirche* (ed. Albert Fuchs; Freistadt: Plöchl, 1976) 182-183.

³⁶ MM 144 suggests the semi-technical meaning that δηλοῦν can sometimes have; cf. I Corinthians 1.11.

³⁷ Presumably it was Epaphras that, according to the fiction of the letter, informed Paul about the crisis in Colossae.

³⁸ See the commentaries on these verses; also the remarks of C.F.D. Moule, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957) 29. Sometimes the scarcity in the epistle of allusions to the Jewish scriptures is also taken as an indication of the gentile background of the author and/or audience, cf. below pp. 126-127.

composition, this Pauline community would have been similar to all those we know that the apostle himself founded. Some scholars contend, additionally, that the letter is intended for a young, only recently established congregation. In support of this theory, they point out the author's predilection for "conversion" language, especially the sorts of counsel that the readers may have heard in the course of missionary preaching or baptismal instruction.³⁹ The inference that follows from this observation, however, does not survive close scrutiny. Given such a penchant for conversion language, an equally plausible explanation would be that in developing a strategy appropriate for the situation at hand, the author sought to remind the readers of the gospel as they had first learned it and of their original commitment to that gospel, along with the beliefs and obligations this would have entailed. Such a strategy may have prompted the epistle's recourse to pseudonymity, as the author sought a setting and formulation of his message that was most consistent with the nature and authority of the gospel as it was originally taught to the community years earlier, under the auspices of the apostle himself while he was residing in Ephesus. According to this scenario, the Christian community at Colossae could have conceivably been twenty or thirty years old, though it would be fair to assume that the letter's readership included at least some more recent converts.

Regardless of how we evaluate the available material regarding the founding of these congregations and the letter's perspective on that series of events, it is obvious that the writer wants to portray the current standing of the readers in a positive light. Indeed, the letter is full of confidence that they have been faithful to God and obedient to the gospel. Perhaps the most cogent assurances of the letter in this area concern their present standing among "the saints" (οἱ ἅγιοι), which in this context refers to those people who have been baptized and are members of the body of Christ.⁴⁰ Paul confirms that, as saints, the readers are among the recipients of divine reconciliation, which has been wrought by God through Christ's death on the cross (1.21-22), a reconciliation of truly universal proportions (1.20). This

³⁹ Morna D. Hooker, for instance, ("Were There False Teachers in Colossae?" *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament: In Honor of C.F.D. Moule* [ed. Barnabas Lindars and Stephen S. Smalley; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973] 318) speaks of a "young Christian community" with "newly-baptized members;" cf. Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 30-40; Clayton R. Bowen, "The Original Form of Paul's Letter to the Colossians," *JBL* 43 (1924) 186-206; Moule, *Colossians*, 24; Martin, *Colossians*, 7.

⁴⁰ Though the term may refer to angels as well as human beings: Pierre Benoit, "'Ἄγιοι en Colossiens 1.12: Hommes ou Anges?" *Paul and Paulinism* (ed. Morna D. Hooker and Stephen G. Wilson; London: SPCK, 1982) 83-99.

reconciliation is possible because the faithful have in Christ redemption, which itself consists of and comes about through the forgiveness of their sins (1.13-14, 2.13-14). This soteriological process is interpreted as a form of "status reversal" for each believer. God has rescued the Colossians, says the author, from the dominion of darkness, the sphere of authority associated with sin and death and with all the powers of evil and immorality that had formerly dominated their lives. In conjunction with this, God also transferred the Colossians to the kingdom of the beloved Son, a sphere of authority in which they are now alive together with Christ, having been qualified for a share of the "inheritance" that the saints can expect to receive from God (1.12-13).⁴¹ The renewal experienced by each reader there is made possible by God's power to create a "new human being" (3.10-11).

The letter-writer expresses confidence in the readers not only by these sorts of explicit statements concerning their status as Christians, but also by reports that tell of the personal response of the apostle to the news of their transformation. In 1.24 ff., for instance, Paul manifests his support for the readers in terms of a self-commendation about his ongoing struggles on behalf of the churches in Colossae and everywhere in the world. An accounting of this type helps to remind the audience of their worthiness as Christians in the eyes of a leader whom they presumably respect, and it also helps to establish the ostensible author as someone who is well-informed and well-intentioned with regard to their affairs. Another example comes closer to the beginning of the epistle. In response to the good news of what God had accomplished in Colossae, Paul indicates that he prays to God, offering thanks for the Colossian Christians and interceding on their behalf (1.3 ff.). Evoking a traditional triad, he gives thanks for their faith in Christ and the love that they have for all the saints, both of which are informed and supported by "the hope laid up for you in heaven."⁴² It is probably significant that the body of the epistle opens with a self-report regarding this prayer-activity. The author, apparently, not only wishes to acknowledge the Colossians' faith through the words of the authoritative figure of Paul, he also wants to elicit their goodwill, preparing a foundation for the various appeals and warnings that will ensue. This prayer-report includes also a positive observation concerning

⁴¹ Cf. Colossians 3.24; in addition to the commentaries see Franz Zeilinger, *Der Erstgeborene der Schöpfung: Untersuchungen zur Formalstruktur und Theologie des Kolosserbriefes* (Wien: Herder, 1974) 138-140; Klaus Wengst, "Versöhnung und Befreiung: Ein Aspekt des Themas 'Schuld und Vergebung' im Lichte des Kolosserbriefes," *EvT* 36 (1976) 19-20.

⁴² Cf. Ceslaus Spicq, *Agapè dans le Nouveau Testament: Analyse des Textes* (EBib; 2 vols.; Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1958-59) 2.365-378.

how the gospel has been bearing fruit among the Colossians, even from the very first day that they heard it, that is, from the time of their conversion to Christianity. In this regard, the reception accorded the gospel in the Lycus River valley parallels what is taking place "in all the world." Put differently, in their success up to this point, the readers participate in and contribute to a global plan of proclamation, redemption, and growth. This plan manifests itself in Paul's own οἰκονομία – the apostolic stewardship and office entrusted to him by God when he himself was converted (cf. 1.25-26).⁴³ In his capacity as a "commissioned officer" of God, Paul unceasingly asks God in prayer that the Colossians may know and do God's will (1.9-10), as he personally strives and suffers toward this end (1.24 ff., 2.1 ff.).

Despite the importance in Colossians of statements relaying commendation and assurance of the variety specified above, especially in the first half of the letter, any attempt to restrict the author's purpose in writing to such statements would be premature. Indeed, this type of encouragement needs to be interpreted within the context of the historical situation that directly prompted the writing of the letter, which is indicated most clearly in 2.4, 8-23. Here the writer alerts the readers to the hazards of a false teaching that threatens their community. Presumably, this threat had appeared on the scene fairly recently, sometime after the initial establishment of Christian churches in the area. Several interpretive questions arise concerning the nature of the danger posed by this new teaching. The first has to do with the extent to which the "philosophy and empty deceit" had already victimized the congregations being addressed. Although the data are sometimes interpreted otherwise,⁴⁴ the urgency of the polemic that the reader encounters in chapter two of the letter, together with the level of specificity with which the philosophy is critiqued, suggest that in the eyes of the author the threat is both real and serious. It does not appear that in Colossians Paul simply anticipates the sorts of commonplace pressures with which any Christian church of the time might have to grapple. Rather, the formulation of the text's commands and comments at numerous points not only reveals authorial knowledge of a specific set of oppositional teachings but also suggests that at least some – and perhaps a sizable number

⁴³ Cf. below, pp. 68 ff.

⁴⁴ Hooker, "False Teachers," 315-331; N.T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon* (Tynedale New Testament Commentaries; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 23-30 (cf. 101); James D.G. Dunn, "The Colossian Philosophy: A Confident Jewish Apologia," *Biblica* 76 (1995) 179-180.

– of the recipients are already submitting to the doctrines of this de-based philosophy.⁴⁵

If this indeed was the case, then one needs to account for affirmations in the text, such as those just mentioned, that seem to assure the Colossians of the apostle's approval. Most likely, we should understand such comments as part of the author's comprehensive argumentative strategy in the letter. In the face of an opposition that threatened the welfare of a community he cared about deeply, the writer chose a means of address that emphasized encouragement and correction of the community, including numerous positive reminders of what they had already learned and accomplished, rather than a method that relied extensively upon frontal attack or personal defense, in a manner such as we find in some other texts of the *Corpus Paulinum*, such as Galatians or II Corinthians.⁴⁶ No doubt, in light of his appreciation for the situation at hand, as well as for the limitations posed by the employment of a pseudepigraphical epistle as a vehicle for addressing that situation, the author deemed this the most effective means for communicating with the audience and achieving his objectives.⁴⁷ This explanation helps to account for the calm tone and instructional character of the author's language.⁴⁸ Even when polemicizing, the letter-writer does not target specific individuals so much as the erroneous teachings that they propagate and the effect that they are having on the community. As far as the opponents go, the most that we find in the letter are oblique references such as *μηδείς* or *τις* (2.4, 8, 16, 18). By and large, the author of Colossians concentrates on the referents of the letter (the mem-

⁴⁵ Pokorny, *Colossians*, 115: "We have to assume that the false teachers influenced a number, if not most house churches in the region addressed;" cf. 195. The formulation of the author's commands, e.g., in 2.16, 18, 20, indicates that the Colossian Christians are already submitting to the false judgments and regulations of the opposition. See also Thomas J. Sappington, *Revelation and Redemption at Colossae* (JSNTSup 53; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991) 161; Murray J. Harris, *Colossians & Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 117-118, 120, 127-129.

⁴⁶ Sappington (*Revelation*, 140, 144-145) makes the distinction between polemical and expository passages in the text; not all of the latter necessarily express direct refutation of the philosophy's positions point by point — in some cases they simply convey material that is deemed by the author to be incompatible with the errorists' teachings, or that provides the necessary basis for polemic elsewhere in the letter, or that serves as a reminder of what the audience may have forgotten.

⁴⁷ This raises the possibility, too, that some or even many of the errorists connected with the philosophy would have understood themselves to be members of the Christian community being addressed by the letter, even loyal to Paul; the author hopes to bring them in line with his version of the authentic apostolic gospel. C.A. Evans ("The Colossian Mystics," *Biblica* 63 [1982] 188-205) even raises the possibility that the errorists themselves appealed to Paul and his authority to arbitrate in the dispute. Cf. below, n. 76.

⁴⁸ Wedderburn, *Theology*, 4.

bers of the Colossian church, the proponents of the philosophy, and even Paul himself) more as typifications of particular views, groups, or institutions, than as specific, dynamic personalities.⁴⁹

A second, more complicated question has to do with the identity of the philosophy. By way of preliminaries, we should note that a great many details that would be of use in answering this question are simply assumed by the author as self-evident. This fact would be consistent also with the employment of the epistolary genre, insofar as letters frequently present themselves as only one moment in an ongoing conversation.⁵⁰ Thus our author perceived no need to furnish a complete or even a coherent account of the threat under consideration. The problems that this situation poses for the task of identification are compounded by the manner of the writer's interaction with the false teachings, which consists to a significant degree of expository material and positive counterarguments. Therefore extracting from the letter a clear résumé of the philosophy's doctrines and practices constitutes a formidable undertaking. This is evident, for example, in the ongoing modern debate as to what extent the author may have actually quoted the words of the errorists in order to refute them.⁵¹ It may be the case that some or many of the phrases in the letter that exegetes have associated with the false teaching – τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου and [ἡ] θρησκεία τῶν ἀγγέλων for instance – do not represent the opponents' own custom of self-expression, but instead the author's denigrating characterization of their beliefs.⁵²

Given that our picture of the philosophy is incomplete, a number of issues are left unresolved. For example, it is unclear whether one may accurately speak of the philosophy as a distinct and opposing "religion" or systematic movement of some kind, which could be distinguished from simply a clutch of corrupting tendencies or syncretic influences that had infiltrated the churches of the region.⁵³ Uncertain, too, is the issue of how one might locate the philosophy

⁴⁹ See below, pp. 212 ff.

⁵⁰ See below, pp. 48-49.

⁵¹ Cf. Wedderburn, *Theology*, 8.

⁵² The former phrase (in 2.8, 20) is probably a pejorative characterization of the author's based upon direct or indirect knowledge of Galatians 4.3, 9; see Sappington, *Revelation*, 168-169; Percy, *Probleme*, 156-167; Wedderburn, *Theology*, 8. On the latter phrase (in 2.18) as a critical term of the author's polemic see Percy, *Probleme*, 168-169; Pierre Benoit, "The 'plērōma' in the Epistles to the Colossians and the Ephesians," *SEÅ* 49 (1984) 151-153.

⁵³ The answer to this depends in part on how we choose to define the term "religion" for this era. For some of the issues involved see Ernst Feil, *Religio: Die Geschichte eines neuzeitlichen Grundbegriffs vom Frühchristentum bis zur Reformation* (Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte 36; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986) 32-49, with references.

in the history-of-religions and, in this way, assess its historical and phenomenological relationship with the different forms of first-century Christianity that are accessible to us.

A proper beginning for the task of addressing these sorts of issues entails outlining some of the false teaching's core features as embedded in the message of the letter.⁵⁴ First, it appears that the cosmology of the teaching took seriously the influence of certain heavenly entities; the author describes these as "principalities and powers" (1.16, 20, 2.15), "the elements of the world" (2.8, 20), and "angels" (2.18). These are supernatural forces that in some fashion determine the cosmic order and control the course of people's lives, though the exact relationship of these three different categories in the philosophy's cosmology is impossible to ascertain. Apparently, the errorists believed these entities to be in some sense hostile, or at least indifferent, to human well-being insofar as they blocked human knowledge of God.⁵⁵ This cosmic condition necessitated a regimen of ritual and ascetic practices designed to placate or appease the powers in order to facilitate human interaction with the divine. Ordinarily, it seems, this access took the form of visions or other assortments of mystical experience.⁵⁶ Judging from 2.18, such experiences included an otherworldly ascent with attendant visions of the heavenly liturgy, the angelic worship of God.⁵⁷ A vision of this type would reveal to the human participant esoteric knowledge, which could be subsequently passed on to other mystics. In this respect it is probably significant that terms associated with wisdom figure prominently in the letter; see, for example, 1.9, 28, 2.3, 8, 23, and 3.16.⁵⁸ This accent on visions and special wisdom suggests, too, that the adherents of the philosophy placed a premium on revelatory words and inspired language (cf. 2.4, 8, 16, 18, 22-23).⁵⁹ As part

⁵⁴ For what follows see esp. Lähnemann, *Kolossierbrief*, 63-107; Lohse, *Colossians*, 127-131; Fred O. Francis and Wayne A. Meeks, eds., *Conflict at Colossae* (SBLBS 4; Missoula: SBL, 1973); Martin, *Colossians*, 8-22; O'Brien, *Colossians*, xxx-xli; Schweizer, *Colossians*, 125-134; Pokorny, *Colossians*, 113-121.

⁵⁵ Though cf. the interpretation of Yates, *Colossians*, 49-53.

⁵⁶ Sappington (*Revelation*, 161) stresses the "significant variety" that most likely characterized the revelations and visionary episodes of the errorists.

⁵⁷ In the literature of Hellenistic Judaism, "apocalyptic visions often climaxed in a vision of the throne (i.e., the Merkabah) and in worship that is offered by the angelic hosts surrounding it." Sappington, *Revelation*, 159 (cf. 90-94); further, Joseph Dan, "The Religious Experience of the Merkavah," *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible through the Middle Ages* (ed. Arthur Green; World Spirituality 13; New York: Crossroad, 1987) 289-307 (with bibliography); Dunn, "Colossian Philosophy," 174-175. If a vision of the Merkabah was a prominent element of the errorists' mystical episodes, then the author's reference to *ἁπόνοι* in 1.16 might take on special emphasis.

⁵⁸ See below, pp. 65-67; cf. Lohse, *Colossians*, 128, n. 114; Zeilinger, *Erstgeborene*, 127-129.

⁵⁹ The importance of speech/language to the dispute may be indicated also in the

of their revelatory scheme, the errorists may also have espoused the existence and power of some kind of heavenly book, which, in a manner consistent with contemporaneous Jewish theology, was believed to record the misdeeds of human kind and (on account of this) to serve as a source of divine dominion and judgment over offenders (cf. Daniel 7.10, Revelation 20.12).⁶⁰ The author refers to this heavenly book rather dimly in 2.14 as a χειρόγραφον (literally, "manuscript"), whose indicting power has been canceled by the Christ-event.

The regimen of ritual and encratite practices promoted by the false teaching must have been its most easily observable characteristic and the author devotes a considerable proportion of his polemic to attacking it. In the view of the philosophy, keeping up with this regimen somehow pacified the supernatural powers, but failure to maintain with them a proper relation in this manner could incur their displeasure and bring one into a situation of debt or bondage.⁶¹ We learn from 2.16 that the errorists honored certain days above others. The author identifies among such days "festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths," invoking a common, perhaps even formulaic reference to the entire system of sacrificial worship associated with ancient Judaism.⁶² Some connection with Judaism and Torah would have been consistent with the pride the errorists apparently placed on their own "tradition" (literally, "that which is handed down," παράδοσις) and their own "teachings" (διδασκαλίας), which the author depreciates as unchristian (2.8, 22).⁶³ Some scholars assume

exhortation relating to this topic in 3.8-9, 13, 16-17, 4.6; cf. Pokorny, *Colossians*, 113: "...we cannot rule out that the negative characteristics of the opponents' teaching were influenced by the widespread disregard at that time for teachers of popular philosophical rhetoric." See below, pp. 154-157.

⁶⁰ Cf. Exodus 32.32-33, Psalms 40.7, 56.8, 69.28, 139.16, Isaiah 4.3, Malachi 3.16, Daniel 12.1, Luke 10.20, Philippians 4.3, Hebrews 10.7, Revelation 3.5, 5.1-5, 13.8, 17.8, 20.15, 21.27, *Odes of Solomon* 23.5-9, *II Baruch* 24.1, *Gospel of Truth* 19-20. Perhaps in Colossae the book was the object of visions, and/or was in some manner connected with the role and authority of angels; in this regard the *Apocalypse of Zechariah* 3.5-9 (from the first century BC or first century AD) is particularly noteworthy for comparative purposes; cf. Leo Koep, *Das himmlische Buch in Antike und Christentum* (Theophania 8; Bonn: Hanstein, 1952) 18 ff., 55-61; Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964) 192-204; Wedderburn, *Theology*, 43-44; Yates, *Colossians*, 46.

⁶¹ O'Brien, *Colossians*, xxxiii.

⁶² Cf. Sappington, *Revelation*, 163-164. See the survey of parallels from biblical and intertestamental literature in Paul Gien, "SABBATON in Col. 2.16," *AUSS* 19 (1981) 198-206; Timothy G.C. Thornton, "Jewish New Moon Festivals, Galatians 4:3-11 and Colossians 2:16," *JTS* 40 (1989) 97-100.

⁶³ Lohse, *Colossians*, 95. On the antiquity of Torah as a topic in Jewish apologetic see, for instance, Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 2.154-156, 282-284, with Droge, *Homer*, 17-19, 44-47.

that, in the practice of such observances, the errorists were influenced also by astrological speculation or by Hellenistic traditions connected with the veneration of astral deities.⁶⁴

Also associated with these observances was a program of strict self-discipline, adopted most likely in order to subdue the flesh, the lower side of one's human nature, and to help induce mystical experiences. The author alludes disparagingly to this program in 2.23 as *ταπεινο-φροσύνη*⁶⁵ and *ἀφειδία σώματος*. He complains that, despite the claims of its practitioners to wisdom, the program is in fact ineffective, even counterproductive, and that in origin it is not divine but is predicated upon merely human standards.⁶⁶ The content of the philosophy's "humility and severity to the body" was expressed in the form of regulations (*τὰ δόγματα* or *τὰ ἐντάλματα*: 2.14, 20-22)⁶⁷ to which one submits by abstaining from certain food and drink, and perhaps also from other perceived sources of impurity, either altogether or for certain intervals of time (perhaps coinciding with or in preparation for the special days mentioned above). These regulations almost certainly had some basis in the commands of the Mosaic law, especially those relating to the maintenance of physical and ritual purity.⁶⁸ Ap-

⁶⁴ Josef Gewiss, "Die apologetische Methode des Apostels Paulus gegen die Irrlehre in Kolossä," *Bibel und Leben* 3 (1962) 259-260; R.S. Barbour, "Salvation and Cosmology: The Setting of the Epistle to the Colossians," *SJT* 20 (1967) 257-271; Günther Bornkamm, "The Heresy of Colossians," in Francis and Meeks, *Conflict*, 123-145; Martin, *Colossians*, 13-14; Lars Hartman, "Humble and Confident: On the So-Called Philosophers in Colossians," *ST* 49 (1995) 29-35.

⁶⁵ This term could encompass a broad range of ascetic practices and was often associated with the pursuit of revelatory experiences; see Fred O. Francis, "Humility and Angelic Worship in Col. 2.18," in Francis and Meeks, *Conflict*, 167-171; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 142; Lona, *Eschatologie*, 200-203; Sappington, *Revelation*, 150-153; Dunn, "Colossian Philosophy," 171, 175-176.

⁶⁶ Cf. *πλησμονή τῆς σαρκός* in 2.23; the regulations of the philosophy are supposed to be of value in checking this, though the Greek presents certain difficulties; on the many possible translations see the commentaries, also below, p. 179, n. 192.

⁶⁷ *δόγματα* refer to Torah regulations in III Maccabees 1.3, IV Maccabees 10.2; *Sibylline Oracles* 3.656; Philo, *Legum Allegoriae* 1.54-55, *De Gigantibus* 52 (cf. *De Vita Contemplativa* 26-27); Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* 15.136, *Contra Apionem* 1.42; Ephesians 2.15; cf. Acts 16.4 (in connection with the decree of the Jerusalem council; cf. nn. 100-101 below); *TDNT* 2.230-232; Lohse, *Colossians*, 110, n. 114. The term, of course, could refer to religious and/or philosophic statutes of pagan origin; the disciples of Pythagoras, for instance, preserve the teachings of the master as though they were "divine dogmas" (*διαφυλάττειν ὡς θεῖα δόγματα*): Iamblichus, *De Vita Pythagorica* 18.82.

⁶⁸ The restrictions regarding food most likely refer to Torah commands such as Leviticus 11.1-23, Deuteronomy 14.4-21. Rules regarding drink might be based upon passages like Leviticus 10.9, 11.34, 36, 38, Numbers 6.3, Judges 13.4, I Samuel 1.11, Jeremiah 35.6 (cf. Luke 1.15, 7.33, 22.18), and/or prohibitions against consuming blood like Leviticus 17.10-14 (cf. Acts 15.20). The commands of 2.21 regarding touch may refer to foods and liquids, or perhaps also to physical contact with sources of impurity such as those indicated in Leviticus 5.2-3, 7.19, 21, 11.8, 24-28, 36, 12.2, 15.5-27, 18.19, 20.18, Numbers 4.15, 19.21-22, 31.19.

parently, other, more ascetically rigorous requirements were added to these Torah regulations, a phenomenon for which there is precedence in some circles of Second Temple Judaism.⁶⁹ The errorists may have additionally postulated some angelic agency for the transmission of these δόγματα.⁷⁰ They also seem to have practiced a rite they termed "circumcision" – perhaps not a physical circumcision, but a series of initiatory or prefatory actions designed to strip away one's fleshly nature.⁷¹

It comes as no surprise that religious objectives of this kind would have fostered contention, both within the ranks of the opposition and between the opposition per se and those Christians (like the author) who repudiated its teachings. The errorists viewed themselves as a spiritual elite, and no doubt competition arose as to the rigor of self-discipline and cultic observance, and as to the quality and quantity of mystical experiences. In the letter we read of individuals who are "vainly puffed up," seeking to "judge" and "disqualify" others on the grounds of such criteria.⁷² The author, for his part, condemns this all as degenerate "human" behavior. The regulations and observances, with their focus on controlling the flesh and placating intermediary beings, represent merely human inventions and human concerns which can lay no valid claim to revealing God's will. The errorists, says Paul, rely too much on their own religious experiences and achievements, overlooking the full soteriological significance of what God has achieved in Christ and what one experiences by being

⁶⁹ Sappington (*Revelation*, 63-70) explores the milieu of such a phenomenon in terms of Jewish apocalypticism; cf. A.J.M. Wedderburn, *The Reasons for Romans* (SNTW; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989) 33-34, who documents extra-legal ascetic practices in Diaspora Judaism more generally. For special purity rules regarding liquids among the Essenes see Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Qumran in Perspective* (London: Collins, 1977) 95-96; Michael Newton, *The Concept of Purity at Qumran and in the Letters of Paul* (SNTSMS 53; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 25-26.

⁷⁰ Sappington, *Revelation*, 218-219; cf. Johann Michl, "Engel II (jüdisch)," *RAC* 5 (1962) 60-97. Some Hellenistic Jews and Christians assigned to angels a role as agents in the imparting of the Mosaic law: O'Brien, *Colossians*, xxxiii; cf. Deuteronomy 33.2, Psalms 68.17, *I Enoch* 60, *Jubilees* 2.2 ff., Acts 7.30, 38, 53, Galatians 3.19, Hebrews 2.2.

⁷¹ The discussion in Colossians 2.11 of a circumcision accomplished "without hands" implies contrast with a circumcision that is deemed to be earthly or unspiritual in nature (cf. 2.13, 3.11); cf. Lohse, *Colossians*, 101-103; George B. Caird, *Paul's Letters from Prison* (New Clarendon Bible; London: Oxford University Press, 1976) 162-164; F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 103-104; Wedderburn, *Theology*, 51; L. William Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 51-52; Dunn, "Colossian Philosophy," 160-162.

⁷² Note the use of present imperatives in 2.16 (κρινέτω) and 18 (καταβραβεύετω).

"in Christ" and "with Christ."⁷³ The religion being observed by the philosophy was tied too closely to the created world and its standards, and not closely enough to the one in whom, through whom, and for whom God created all things (1.16). In contrast to their program, the author promotes cooperative virtues that help to unify the church as the body of Christ.

This raises the problem of understanding the place of Christ in the belief system of the philosophy. The manner of the letter's argumentation in 2.8 suggests that neither Paul nor the Colossians take it as self-evident that the opposition's "tradition" is not Christian, raising the possibility that the errorists presented their teachings as such, or at least as compatible with certain Christian principles. Indeed, the author apparently found it necessary to state explicitly for his readers the apostolic opinion that the philosophy was not in fact "in accord with Christ," but rather "in accord with the elements of the cosmos," in order to remove any misunderstanding. It is probable that the opponents regarded "fullness" (πλήρωμα) as a sort of technical term for the aggregate of divine powers through which one could seek access to God (1.19, 2.9).⁷⁴ Apparently, their cognizance of fullness and cosmic forces did not necessarily exclude some version of faith in Christ as a divine being. An "irreducible fact," as Fred Francis writes, is "that the writer never explicitly identifies for attack any specific christological position of the opponents."⁷⁵ It is possible, then, that they did not perceive of themselves as enemies of the Christian movement.⁷⁶ This created a grave predicament for the author, though, insofar as the philosophy's pursuit of "higher" and different venues to deity brought the significance of faith in Christ into question, compromising Christ's role in salvation history and the sufficiency of God's power and grace as realized in him. While the errorists may not have disputed Christ's divine sonship or his unique role in creation,⁷⁷ from the author's perspective their religious teach-

⁷³ Yates, "Reappraisal," 114.

⁷⁴ For the use of the πληρ stem in Colossians see below, p. 66, n. 79. Also, πληρομὴ in 2.23 may represent a word-play on that stem.

⁷⁵ Fred O. Francis, "The Christological Argument of Colossians," *God's Christ and His People: Studies in Honor of Nils A. Dahl* (ed. Wayne A. Meeks and Jacob Jervell; Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1977) 204.

⁷⁶ Lohse, *Colossians*, 3: "...adherents of this teaching, as well as members of the community who paid attention to them, presumably supposed that this 'philosophy' could very easily be united with Christian faith." This suggests some of the vagaries of defining "Christian faith" in this sort of context.

⁷⁷ Sappington, *Revelation*, 175-176: "Our survey of...polemical and expository texts uncovered nothing to suggest that the errorists denied Christ's supreme role in creation, for statements as to his role in creation occur at no point subsequent to the hymn of 1.15-20. Also, when Christ's position as head over the spiritual forces is mentioned (2.9), the context has to do with the greatness of his redemption for those

ings entail a serious misunderstanding of the soteriological and moral implications of Christian existence.⁷⁸ Conversely, we would certainly expect the author to have assumed a much stronger polemical position, avoiding positive statements regarding the recipients' status such as those in 1.3-8, had the philosophy been a non-Christian movement that posed the threat of apostasy to the Colossian churches.⁷⁹

Features such as those discussed above invite comparison with a myriad of religious and philosophic movements known to students of antiquity. Literally dozens of hypotheses have been formulated regarding the identity of the Colossian philosophy in the history of scholarship, a fact that suggests the improbability of our ever deriving any definite solution to this problem of identification.⁸⁰ Some critics, for example, have held up the theology of the Essene community at Qumran for comparison.⁸¹ Martin Dibelius, in contrast, argued forcefully that the philosophy was best interpreted as a type of pagan mystery cult, exhibiting little or no Jewish influence.⁸² He and others have also endeavored to unearth the gnostic or (better) proto-gnostic presuppositions of the errorists.⁸³ Eduard Schweizer submitted yet another option, positing some kind of mystery rite whose belief system was shaped by Jewish Pythagorean

who are 'in Christ.' So it seems that teaching as to Christ's headship functions to undergird Paul's soteriological argument, without necessarily implying that the errorists explicitly denigrated the position of Christ by viewing him simply as one of many spiritual powers."

⁷⁸ Perhaps they relegated Christ's role to that of only a partial revelation of God: Lähnemann, *Kolosserbrief*, 117.

⁷⁹ That the opposition is Christian in nature cf. Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 98-113; Percy, *Probleme*, 142; Francis, "Humility," 183-184; Hooker, "False Teachers," 319; Schweizer, *Colossians*, 133; Lindemann, *Kolosserbrief*, 82; Pokorny, *Colossians*, 113-120; Yates, *Colossians*, 56-58; Hartman, "Humble and Confident," 35-39.

⁸⁰ John J. Gunther, *St. Paul's Opponents and Their Background: A Study of Apocalyptic and Jewish Sectarian Teachings* (NovTSup 35; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973) 3-4. For a critique of the whole enterprise see Wayne A. Meeks, "'To Walk Worthily of the Lord': Moral Formation in the Pauline School Exemplified by the Letter to Colossians," *Hermes and Athena: Biblical Exegesis and Philosophical Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993) 37-38.

⁸¹ Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 71-111, 347-417; W.D. Davies, "Paul and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Flesh and Spirit," *The Scrolls and the New Testament* (ed. Krister Stendahl; New York: Harper, 1957) 166-169; for a different assessment cf. Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Sectarian Parallels: Qumran and Colossae," *BSac* 121 (1964) 141-152.

⁸² Martin Dibelius, "The Isis Initiation in Apuleius and Related Initiatory Rites," in Francis and Meeks, *Conflict*, 61-121.

⁸³ Bornkamm, "Heresy," 123-145; Hans-Martin Schenke, "Der Widerstreit gnostischer und kirchlicher Christologie im Spiegel des Kolosserbriefes," *ZTK* 61 (1964) 391-403; Roy Yates, "Colossians and Gnosis," *JST* 27 (1986) 49-68; Jarl Fossum, "Colossians 1.15-18a in the Light of Jewish Mysticism and Gnosticism," *NTS* 35 (1989) 183-201; Michael Goulder, "Colossians and Barbelo," *NTS* 41 (1995) 601-619; cf. below, p. 176, n. 182.

reanism.⁸⁴ More recently, Richard DeMaris has postulated for the Colossian philosophy a movement whose thought is "recognizably Middle Platonic" while embodying "a Jewish outlook."⁸⁵

Taking these and numerous other possibilities into consideration, however, the position developed by Fred Francis and those who have followed his line of interpretation seems to present the best case.⁸⁶ These writers contend that the Colossian error "was strongly oriented toward the ascetic-mystical piety of Jewish apocalypticism,"⁸⁷ as exhibited in Hellenistic Jewish texts such as First and Second Enoch, Fourth Ezra, and Second and Third Baruch. An explanation like this would help to account not only for the distinctively Jewish contours of the philosophy, which seem to be foundational for its religious identity, but also for the sort of specific cosmological, mystical, and ascetic tendencies just outlined.⁸⁸ In this case, the frequently noted emphasis of the text on the divine blessings and soteriological status already achieved for the readers – the "realized" eschatology of Colossians – may be interpreted as a result of the author's efforts to contest and downplay the apocalyptic perspectives that informed the cultic-ascetic praxis of the opposition.⁸⁹

As correct as this general line of inquiry in scholarship seems to be, it in fact associates the Colossian philosophy with a fairly wide-ranging set of religious phenomena and forms of expression. Consequently, some critics have attempted to extend observations of the sort made above by examining the evidence in comparison with a more specifically defined religious movement of antiquity. F.F. Bruce, to name one, concentrated on the texts of Merkabah mysticism for comparative data, though in most instances these materials originate from centuries later than the probable date that Colossians was written.⁹⁰ Another possibility that warrants attention has to do with the Elchasaite traditions.⁹¹ While, from an historical

⁸⁴ Schweizer, *Colossians*, 131-133, and s.v. Pythagoras.

⁸⁵ Richard E. DeMaris, *The Colossian Controversy: Wisdom in Dispute at Colossae* (JSNTSup 96; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994) 131-133, and passim.

⁸⁶ Francis, "Humility," 163-195, cf. 197-207.

⁸⁷ Sappington, *Revelation*, 225.

⁸⁸ This is most completely demonstrated by Sappington, *Revelation*, passim; cf. Andrew J. Bandstra, "Did the Colossian Errorists Need a Mediator?" *New Dimensions in New Testament Study* (ed. Richard N. Longenecker and Merrill C. Tenney; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974) 329-343; Evans, "The Colossian Mystics," 188-205; O'Brien, *Colossians*, xxx-xli, 101 ff., 135 ff.; Dunn, "Colossian Philosophy," 153-181.

⁸⁹ Sappington, *Revelation*, 227; cf. Lona, *Eschatologie*, 230-240.

⁹⁰ Bruce, *Colossians*, 17-26; cf. Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (3rd ed.; New York: Schocken, 1954) 40-79; idem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960); Yates, *Colossians*, 54-58.

⁹¹ J.L. Houlden, *Paul's Letters from Prison* (Pelican NT Commentaries; Middlesex:

vantage point, it is impossible that the errorists at Colossae actually were Elchasaites (the latter movement began no earlier than about 100 AD), the teachings and practices of this Jewish-Christian sect present the most instructive parallels to what we encounter in the polemic of Colossians, and they exemplify the type of syncretic developments that could occur within a single, distinct religious group during this time in the Mediterranean world.

As for the particulars, we know that Elchasai was a Jewish prophet with apocalyptic leanings who was active in Syria and/or Parthia during the first decades of the second century AD.⁹² Our primary informant on the religious movement founded by this charismatic figure lived some one hundred years later, namely, Hippolytus, who critiques the Elchasaites especially in book nine of his *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium*.⁹³ There Hippolytus assails both a certain Alcibiades of Apamea, a Syrian-born leader of the movement in Rome, as well as the contents of a certain book of Elchasai, which is apparently cited on several occasions.⁹⁴ Hippolytus' account portrays the Elchasaites as a Jewish-Christian heretical sect and proselytizing movement whose teachings (διδασκαλία) had been promulgated "throughout the entire world." Adherents were directed to comport themselves in accordance with Torah regulations, including the laws concerning Sabbath observance⁹⁵ and circumcision. These directives were in some manner mingled with practices borrowed from certain pagan traditions, especially those associated with Neopythagorean philosophy. The religious orientation of the Elchasaites relied on revelatory visions and esoteric "mysteries," which were mediated by angels and included predictions of an imminent eschatological conflict. The tradents of the sect tied these mystical experiences to a program of ascetic discipline (which Hippolytus condemns as vain and pretended) and a fascination with astrological speculation. The special μυστήρια are "handed down" (παραδίδοσθαι) to "worthy students," who guard them from outsiders. In his reaction to the heretical traditions, Hippolytus admits his astonishment at the "force of

Penguin, 1970) 195-196; Bornkamm, "Heresy," 132-133; Martin, *Colossians*, 14; Wedderburn, *Theology*, 6-12.

⁹² For a thorough review of the evidence see Gerard P. Luttikhuisen, *The Revelation of Elchasai* (TSAJ 8; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1985).

⁹³ A.F.J. Klijn and G.J. Reinink, eds., *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects* (NovTSup 36; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973) 54-67, 112-121, 154-161, 258-259; R. McL. Wilson, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha, Volume 2* (rev. ed.; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991) 685-690.

⁹⁴ The nature of Hippolytus' critique makes it virtually impossible to determine where exactly he is citing the book and where, instead, he may be interacting with the (written or oral) teachings of Alcibiades or other Elchasaites.

⁹⁵ Cf. Pokorny, *Colossians*, 143, n. 2.

words" (δύναμις τῶν λόγων) behind them, though he contends that this is nothing but the "invention of a puffed-up heart" (ἐπίνοια πεφυσιωμένης καρδίας) and the whole program is a hoax.

From its inception, apparently, Elchasaitism was also a Christian movement in some sense, though church leaders took objection to certain adoptionist features of its christology, which included also theories about numerous reincarnations of Jesus. Also objectionable were Elchasaite baptismal practices, particularly the administration of a second baptism in order to obtain remission of certain sins. Participants were to invoke seven "witnesses," including certain elements such as earth, water, and salt. Evidently, Alcibiades even prescribed for some followers (such as those possessed of demons) a regimen of forty baptisms in seven days. Such rites needed to be observed cautiously, though; Elchasaites believed in "the power of the days" on which one should not be baptized, or indeed commence work of any kind (cf. Colossians 2.11-17, with its instruction on baptism, days, and power). Finally, Gerd Luedemann hypothesizes that "anti-Paulinism had been a traditional constituent element of Elkesaite doctrine."⁹⁶ This animosity towards Paul and Pauline Christianity would have been due, at least in part, to the apostle's perceived abandonment of his Jewish identity, as evident particularly in his refusal to impose Torah-obedience upon his gentile converts. If the errorists at Colossae similarly placed special value on membership in the Jewish covenant and allegiance to Jewish traditions,⁹⁷ then comments in the letter such as those located in 1.27, 3.11, and 4.11, together with the author's basic emphasis on the universal character of the Pauline gospel, would have possessed a relevant polemical point.

The New Testament itself indicates the likelihood of just such a confrontation in the early church. There is an abundance of evidence from early Christian texts that gentile Christianity, and Pauline Christianity in particular, came into conflict with certain Jewish-Christian movements which sought to require of gentile converts certain regulations relating to Torah and/or formal association with the Jewish community. Without wishing to connect the Colossian errorists directly with any one of these other groups, they all may be similarly classified under the basic heading of Jewish-Christian mis-

⁹⁶ Gerd Luedemann, *Opposition to Paul in Jewish Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) 138, cf. 129-139.

⁹⁷ In line with this, some connection for the errorists with synagogue life, either on a formal or simply ideational level, could be entertained; here the possibility that συναγωγῶν in 2.8 represents the author's wordplay on συναγωγή can be noted: Wright, *Colossians*, 100.

sionary movements of the late first and early second centuries AD. Paul's opponents at Galatia and Philippi, for instance, would appear to belong to this general category.⁹⁸ Also, the "weak" at Rome may constitute a distinct group of Jewish Christians who observe special days, abstain from certain food and drink, and are criticized by the apostle for passing judgment on the "strong," that is, gentile Christians with whose position Paul aligns himself.⁹⁹ Acts 15 also furnishes relevant comparative information. Here Luke depicts a Jewish-Christian movement, whose membership includes some ex-Pharisees (verse 5), which both upheld Jewish purity rules and sought to impose a modified purity code (similar in details to versions of the so-called Noachite laws)¹⁰⁰ upon gentile converts. The regulations being repudiated in Colossians 2.21 could represent a comparable type of code in terms of content and function; see Acts 15.20, 29, and 21.25.¹⁰¹

It would appear, then, that the Colossian philosophy advocated a form of Jewish-Christian religious observance that was similar both as a whole and in numerous details to Elchasaitism, which began to develop as a distinct movement some twenty or thirty years later. It may not be terribly misleading to refer to this group in Colossae as a type of proto-Elchasaitism. This would have been a variety of Jewish Christianity that set its beliefs and practices within a more speculative and mystical framework than most contemporaneous forms of Judaism or Christianity, owing in large part to the syncretic nature of its interaction with the pagan host culture.¹⁰² The basis of the opponents' religious claims and values was not Torah-obedience per se, or belief in Christ per se, though both of these elements are present, but rather the esoteric wisdom revealed to them in visions and mystical experiences.

The response of the writer of Colossians to this threat, interestingly enough, grounds itself in the traditional Jewish-Christian theology

⁹⁸ See esp. Galatians 2.12, 4.10, 17, 5.2-12, 6.12-13, Philippians 3.1-4.1.

⁹⁹ See esp. Romans 14.1-23; Wedderburn, *Reasons*, 44-65; further cf. Hebrews 9.10, I Timothy 4.1-3.

¹⁰⁰ These rules were felt to be as equally binding for gentiles as they were for Jews; see Wilson, *Mysteries*, 69 for references, to which add Markus Bockmuehl, "The Noachide Commandments and New Testament Ethics," *RB* 102 (1995) 72-101.

¹⁰¹ The account of this "apostolic council" provided in the first two chapters of Galatians indicates that Pauline Christianity opposed (or at least had nothing to do with) such codes, despite the apparent agreement recorded by Luke. On the historical and literary issues involved see Rudolf Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (EKK 5; 2 vols.; Zürich: Benziger Verlag; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1986) 2.68-90.

¹⁰² Cf. Lähnemann, *Kolossarbrief*, 102-103.

of the so-called Christ Hymn of 1.15-20, the contents of which inform the principal soteriological affirmations of the epistle.¹⁰³ Here the reader finds ascribed to Christ a number of qualities ordinarily attributed in Hellenistic Jewish circles to divine *sophia* or *logos*. In the mythology of the hymn, Christ is, in effect, God's wisdom, as the fullness of deity dwells in him.¹⁰⁴ Most critical for the letter's argument is the claim that Christ is the "head" of all cosmic or intermediary powers and is "preeminent" (πρωτεύων) in all things. Having disarmed and subjected these powers, he sustains and upholds their very existence. Consequently, these powers are unable to thwart God's plan of forgiveness and redemption for those who are "in Christ" or to hold sway over them by imposing "regulations." The victory of God, achieved through Christ's death and resurrection, is completely sufficient to ensure the salvation of all those who have been baptized, apart from special revelatory experiences and any ascetic-cultic program associated with them.

God's saving purpose in Christ, then, has already been revealed through the gospel, the mystery that Paul proclaims to all who will accept it. As the author maintains, the Colossian Christians have already been saved from their previous predicament of sin and idolatry and raised to a new life with Christ through faith in the power of God (2.12). Because they are in Christ, they already have full access to all the treasures of divine wisdom and knowledge (2.3), and it is therefore only in Christ that they can grow in such knowledge. Thus they must aspire not to the realm of the created world, the realm associated with the "elements" of the world, but to the realm above, where Christ is, and fix their thoughts there, so that they might comport themselves in a fashion that reflects their new identity. The letter shows that this new mode of existence, this "new human nature" (3.9-10) is above all distinguished by thanksgiving to God, love for one another, and resistance to anything that is not centered on Christ. The substance of the letter's ethic in this regard, like its soteriology, draws from the theology of Hellenistic Judaism, mediated by the traditions of the Pauline churches.¹⁰⁵ According to the author's

¹⁰³ See, e.g., Hartmut Löwe, "Bekenntnis, Apostelamt und Kirche im Kolosserbrief," *Kirche: Festschrift für Günther Bornkamm* (ed. Dieter Lührmann and Georg Strecker; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1980) 308-309; Stephen E. Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul: An Analysis of the Function of the Hymnic Material in the Pauline Corpus* (JSNTSup 36; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990) 130-154.

¹⁰⁴ In addition to the commentaries (esp. Schweizer), see André Feuillet, *Le Christ Sage de Dieu d'après les Épîtres Pauliniennes* (Paris: Gabalda, 1966) 163-273.

¹⁰⁵ Thus the pseudepigrapher's theological and moral orientation (like that of the apostle) is Jewish and Jewish-Christian in character, even taking the dynamics of the polemical situation into account. See Zeilinger, *Erstgeborene*, 92, 106-108, 135-136,

argument, it is only by allowing this sort of calling to take shape in their own lives that the recipients can hope to be presented as “mature” or “blameless” (τέλειος) when they are ultimately revealed with Christ in glory (1.28, 3.4, 4.12). A major concern for the author, then, presents itself in the form of a wide-ranging plea for the readers to embrace a certain moral agenda that is consistent with their theological affirmations and for them to realize this agenda concretely as a manifestation of their new status and of Christ’s lordship in the world.

Moral Exhortation in Colossians: Some Formal Considerations

A basic task for the present investigation of Colossians is to address the issue of how the author has designed this moral appeal and to identify the ideas and methods that would have made the letter effective in communicating its message to a Hellenistic audience. We may begin this study with some preliminary remarks regarding the formal characteristics of the text itself that are pertinent to explicating the nature of the author’s message. These remarks will be useful both as a demonstration that moral exhortation is indeed a central concern for the letter-writer and as a means of exposing some of the characteristic features of the epistle’s moral appeal.

First, we note that the author of Colossians frequently speaks the language of exhortation as it would have been known to his contemporaries, exhibiting an active concern for the readers’ moral welfare. To illustrate: in the epistle, Paul demonstrates a sustained interest in the “life” of the Colossian Christians and in the way that they “live” (2.20, 3.4, 7). In fact, the scope of his plea extends to all aspects of life, encompassing everything that the Colossians might say or do (3.17). In a manner consistent with this broad compass, the verb περιπατεῖν figures in the message of the text at a number of prominent locations, including a centrally placed summarizing statement in 2.6-7.¹⁰⁶ Presupposed by the use of this term is the idea that human existence involves a sort of journey through which one walks or conducts oneself, an ongoing trek whose nature and destination

and passim; Barth, *Colossians*, 64-69 (with references). It is in this context, perhaps, that the choice of pseudonym for the epistle may be appreciated, esp. if in the memory of the author Paul was viewed as a successful defender of gentile Christians in the church over against Jewish-Christian missionaries who attempted to impose on them distinctively Jewish religious obligations. Many of the author’s claims can be interpreted as attempts to outdo the Jewish-Christian opponents on their own terms.

¹⁰⁶ See below, pp. 241-242.

depend upon the choice of one path over another.¹⁰⁷ Life, then, exhibits a certain unity of direction and purpose, and one's path corresponds to one's personal and self-chosen identity.¹⁰⁸ So when the author exhorts the readers to "walk in Christ" the reference is to the entire way in which they have and will conduct themselves. Similarly, the author calls upon them to behave wisely in their interactions with "outsiders" (4.5),¹⁰⁹ and prays to God that their wisdom may manifest itself in good deeds that are worthy of "the Lord" and fully pleasing to him (1.10). The repeated reference in the letter to "the Lord" also implies a certain specific variety of obedience on the part of believers to Christ, their heavenly master, which relates as well to how they conduct themselves vis-à-vis one another (see especially the household code). While the moral appeal of the letter-writer is indeed Christ-centered, his expectation is that the conduct of the addressees will at the same time conform with what is generally deemed to be "fitting," "acceptable," and "fair" (3.18, 20, 4.1).¹¹⁰ All this would contrast with their previous way of life, before the moral transformation associated with being "in Christ." This former mode of existence was marred by degrading and ungodly vices (3.5-8), evil works and practices (1.21, 3.9), and "transgressions" (2.13).¹¹¹ The Colossians were, in truth, morally "dead" (2.13).

The author's interest in Christian comportment finds expression moreover in language that pertains to the moral instruction of the Colossian community, both past and present.¹¹² The letter-writer alludes positively to the manner in which they "learned," "received," and "were taught" the gospel (1.7, 2.6-7).¹¹³ In his own proclamation, Paul himself admonishes and teaches all people "in all wisdom" (1.28), and entreats the members of the Colossian congregations to do likewise among themselves (3.16).¹¹⁴ One of the main objectives

¹⁰⁷ As Epictetus observes (*Diatribae* 2.12.3), life is a *ὁδός*, for which one needs a *ὁδηγός*; cf. Plutarch, *De Profectibus in Virtute* 76C; Maximus of Tyre, *Orationes* 16.2.

¹⁰⁸ Joseph O. Holloway, *ΠΕΡΙΠΑΤΕΩ as a Thematic Marker for Pauline Ethics* (San Francisco: Mellen, 1992) 168-187.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. below, p. 170.

¹¹⁰ All three of these terms would be at home in the idiom of popular moral philosophy. On *ἀνῆκεν* see *EDNT* 1.98 (cf. *ἀρεσκέα* in 1.10). On *εὐάρεστον* see *TDNT* 1.456-457; *NIDNTT* 2.814-817. On *ισότης* see *LSJ* 1459; *TDNT* 3.354-355; *EDNT* 2.202.

¹¹¹ These terms are common to the moral discourse of the time. On *τὰ ἔργα τὰ πονηρά* see *TDNT* 2.636, 645, 6.557. On *πρᾶξις* (connected with the "old" humanity) see *LSJ* 1459; *BAGD* 697-698; *TDNT* 6.642-644. On *παράπτωμα* see *TDNT* 6.170-172; *EDNT* 3.33-34.

¹¹² Meeks, "To Walk Worthily," 39-42.

¹¹³ On *μανθάνειν* see *LSJ* 1078-1079; *TDNT* 4.393-399, 406-412; *EDNT* 2.383-384; *NIDNTT* 1.480-494; on *παραλαμβάνειν* see below, p. 67, n. 82.

¹¹⁴ Cf. in 2.2 *συμβιβασθέντες ἐν ἀγάπῃ*, which could be rendered "being instructed

for the Pauline mission, as it works with the members of all the apostle's churches, is to "encourage their hearts" – to strengthen the inner self of each person, the source of one's will, emotion, and understanding.¹¹⁵ Paul's desire is that they all might come to full conviction regarding their insight for understanding the mystery of God, which is Christ in their midst, Christ, who is their life (2.2, cf. 3.3-4, 4.8). This all contributes to their ongoing "growth" in Christ, one of the letter's central themes (1.6, 10, 23, 2.7, 19).

In addition to the employment of terms and ideas associated with moral conduct and guidance, we detect in the letter a significant amount of "prescriptive" speech, an essential feature of any sort of exhortation, which involves the utilization of imperatives as well as other grammatical constructions that possess an imperatival function of some kind.¹¹⁶ The prescriptive character of Colossians is indicated by the large number of both direct commands issued with imperatives as well as various complementary or surrogate commands.¹¹⁷ The reader of the epistle is confronted with approximately thirty imperatives of different types (second and third person plural, present and aorist). Their impact is intensified somewhat inasmuch as the imperatives are concentrated in a 61-verse section of the text, 2.6-4.18, which constitutes about the last two-thirds of the letter.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, many of these imperatives are buttressed by subordinate participles, which supplement and expand their commands.¹¹⁹ There are also several instances where the grammar of a sentence requires that an imperative be supplied.¹²⁰ Equally vital to the author's address are numerous indirect appeals of various kinds. These are conveyed through devices such as prayer reports (both thanksgiving and intercessory prayers: 1.4, 6, 9-11, 4.12), conditional sentences (1.23), biographical statements (2.2, 4), doctrinal reminders (for example, 2.13), rhetorical question (2.20), and ridicule of the opponents' commands (2.21). All of these formulations in one way or

in love" rather than "being knit together in love;" see Martin Dibelius and Heinrich Greeven, *An die Kolosser, Epheser, An Philemon* (HNT 12; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1953) 25-26; *TDNT* 7.763-766.

¹¹⁵ Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms: A Study of their Use in Conflict Settings* (AGJU 10; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971) 305-333.

¹¹⁶ Hildegard Cancik, *Untersuchungen zu Senecas Epistulae Morales* (Spudasmata 18; Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1967) 16, 23.

¹¹⁷ Cancik, *Untersuchungen*, 23, n. 42; Troy W. Martin, *Metaphor and Composition in 1 Peter* (SBLDS 131; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992) 90-91.

¹¹⁸ Colossians 2.6, 8, 16, 18, 3.1, 2, 5, 8, 9, 12, 15a, 15c, 16a, 18, 19 (bis), 20, 21, 22, 23, 4.1, 2, 5, 10c, 15, 16, 17 (bis), 18b; δουλεύετε (3.24) and εἰδέναι (4.6) could be imperatives as well: Harris, *Colossians*, 185-186, 197.

¹¹⁹ Colossians 2.7 (quad), 3.9, 10, 13 (bis), 16 (tris), 22, 24, 4.1, 2, 3, 5.

¹²⁰ Colossians 1.2b, 3.13b, 14a, 17, 4.6, 18c.

another convey the author's value judgments, indicating to the reader what sorts of moral behavior are commended and what sorts are not. They may also reveal certain reasons, principles, or motivations for the moral conduct that is directly called for elsewhere.¹²¹ The total effect of these exhortatory features not only lends to the letter its prescriptive tone, but contributes also in a particular manner to the persona of Paul as the author, his perceived authority and moral concern.

On its own, of course, the observation that Colossians makes significant use of imperatives and imperatival surrogates says little about the moral constitution of our text. When the character of the larger units in which these verbal forms occur is taken into account, though, a clearer picture emerges with regard to the author's ethics. We see that the letter's thirty or so imperatives are employed especially in one or more of three literary forms, all of which represent basic sub-genres in antiquity for structuring moral directives. These forms are the gnomic saying, the listing of virtues and vices, and the *Haustafel*, or table of household duties.¹²² These forms can be found in all sorts of paraenetic literature of the Hellenistic era, including the moral exhortation of popular philosophy. Some brief comments on each of these exhortatory forms are in order.

To begin with, there is something on the order of twenty-two maxims in the letter, all concentrated in the thirty-one verses between 3.1 and 4.6.¹²³ The gnomic style was most appropriate and highly effective in ancient moral exhortation for a number of reasons. Gnostic utterances, like our author's τῇ προσευχῇ προσκαρτερεῖτε ("persevere in prayer": 4.2a), are short, striking, and memorable, sometimes profiting from certain poetic devices like (as in this case) alliteration.¹²⁴ They often possess, additionally, a traditional aura, particularly insofar as they tend to present themselves as authoritative moral commands or moral conclusions that express the tried-and-true insight of past generations and common human experience. Indeed, the concepts of gnomic wisdom are commonly predicated upon shared cultural norms and customs and serve as vehicles for their preservation. The purveyors of maxims, however, do not merely create accessible expressions of conventional perspicacity;

¹²¹ Cf. Cancik, *Untersuchungen*, 23, 30-31.

¹²² Because the gnomic saying can be utilized in conjunction with the other two forms listed here, some of the letter's imperatives function in two different literary units.

¹²³ Colossians 3.1b, 2, 5a, 9a, 11b, 13b, 15a, 15c, 16a, 17a, 18, 19, 20a, 21, 22a, 23a, 24b, 25, 4.1a, 2a, 5a, 6a (maybe 3.6 [minus the δι' αἵ]).

¹²⁴ Cf. Romans 12.12c, with Wilson, *Love*, 164, n. 48.

they also strive to influence moral choice by recommending for consideration certain reliable moral paradigms or rules that can inform the outlook of those who use and learn from them.¹²⁵ As befits its Pauline pseudonym and moral heritage, the gnostic formulations of Colossians appear to be indebted in particular to the practical wisdom of Hellenistic Judaism.¹²⁶

Another literary form that is practically ubiquitous in the popular moral discourse of the time is the listing of virtues and/or vices.¹²⁷ The application of such lists within an admonitory context represented a facet of the broader philosophic quest to interpret virtue and to analyze its constituent elements so as to assist the pursuit of an exemplary life.¹²⁸ Their usage presupposed also the prevalent idea, mentioned earlier, that human flourishing relies upon an individual's decision to walk in one path or another, and that one's conduct will be consistent with that decision. The cataloguing of virtues and vices boils the decision down to the most unequivocal options. The enumeration of the key moral aspects or signposts of these "two ways" in life not only serves a descriptive and explanatory task but also highlights the sharp contrast between choices.¹²⁹

In an early Christian context, the decision to opt for a life of virtue over a life of vice would be ordinarily presented with clear allusions to the turning-point represented by baptism, the movement's initiatory rite, and the profound moral impact it was perceived to have on the participant.¹³⁰ Christians often set the choice for baptism within the framework of eschatological judgment as well, which serves as a motivation and an indication of the final destination of one's path, as determined by God (see Colossians 3.6, cf. 3.4, 13, 24).¹³¹ Becoming a Christian meant assuming a new order of human existence that capacitated the virtuous life. Thus Paul can speak to the readers of their "stripping off the old human being" and "putting to death" the "members" of one's body that are "on the earth," that is, the vices that corrupted their former selves, such as sexual im-

¹²⁵ Wilson, *Love*, 11-24, 200-212.

¹²⁶ Cf. Wilson, *Love*, 91 ff., 149 ff.

¹²⁷ For overview and bibliography see John T. Fitzgerald, "Virtue/Vice Lists," *ABD* 6 (1992) 857-859.

¹²⁸ Wilson, *Mysteries*, 42-59, with references.

¹²⁹ On "Two Ways" instruction see Wilson, *Mysteries*, 41, 185, with references, to which add Willy Rordorf, "Un Chapitre d'Ethique Judéo-Chrétienne: Les Deux Voies," *RSR* 60 (1972) 109-128. On the "ethical dualism" presupposed by such lists see Siegfried Wibbing, *Die Tugend- und Lasterkataloge im Neuen Testament und ihre Traditionsgeschichte unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Qumran-Texte* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1959) 61 ff.

¹³⁰ Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 150-157.

¹³¹ O'Brien, *Colossians*, 180; Pokorny, *Colossians*, 163.

morality and idolatry (3.5, 9). He then exhorts them to "put on" the new human being and along with it certain Christ-like virtues that are appropriate to their new status as the elect of God, such as mercy and endurance (3.10, 12). Some commentators believe that here the author is involved in the ethical interpretation and catechetical application of the actual disrobing and reclothing associated with the rite of baptism, as well as with certain oaths that may have been part of that ritual.¹³² Looking at the individual virtues and vices mentioned in Colossians 3.5, 8, and 12, however, we notice that the lion's share of items would have been at home in a non-Christian setting as well, indicating something of the cross-cultural nature of the author's counsel.¹³³ So while the lists must have been of use in delineating moral boundaries peculiar to Christian existence, reminding the readers of the moral commitment they incurred in baptism, the elements of the sort of life depicted would have simultaneously won widespread approval, most of all from people interested in moral philosophy.¹³⁴

Another prevalent strategy for articulating moral obligations in the Hellenistic era that occurs in Colossians, and one that has been the subject of abundant scholarly attention, is the so-called *Haustafel*.¹³⁵ This form also makes use of lists, though in this case it is lists of moral "duties" appropriate to different members of the household, especially as they relate to other members of the household. In its Greco-Roman origins, this sort of domestic code was related both to the common philosophic *topos* *περὶ οἰκονομίας* and to the discussions of *καθήκοντα* such as we read especially in Stoic literature. Like the cataloguing of virtues and vices, the substance and tone of the *Haustafel* in Colossians 3.18-4.1 would have been at home in the pagan culture of the time, though its most immediate parallels belong to the Greek literature of Second Temple Judaism, which had already appropriated such formulations for its own instructional and apologetic purposes; see, for example, Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 2.190-219; Philo, *Hypothetica* 8.7.1-20; Pseudo-Phocylides, *Sentences*

¹³² Cf. below, pp. 115-124.

¹³³ Cf. below, pp. 104-109.

¹³⁴ The modifications or distinctions evident in Christian lists such as those found in Colossians as compared with pagan models are due to the influence of Hellenistic-Jewish theology, through which they may in fact have been mediated; see Siegfried Schulz, *Neutestamentliche Ethik* (Zürcher Grundrisse zur Bibel; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1987) 560-571; Wolfgang Schrage, *Die konkreten Einzelgebote in der paulinischen Paränese: Ein Beitrag zur neutestamentlichen Ethik* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1961) 187-210.

¹³⁵ For overview and bibliography see Peter Fiedler, "Haustafel," *RAC* 13 (1986) 1063-1073; David L. Balch, "Household Codes," *Greco-Roman Literature and the New Testament* (ed. David E. Aune; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 25-50.

175-227.¹³⁶ Such recommendations as we find in the Colossian table followed a well-established blueprint for achieving harmony and decorum in the household. The extensive use of imperatives and gnomes underscores the exhortatory nature of the passage. The author calls upon wives in the audience to be subject to their husbands, for husbands to love their wives, for children to obey their parents, and for fathers not to provoke their children "lest they become discouraged" (3.21). The longest single section within the table addresses slaves (3.22-25): they ought, says Paul, to obey their lords "in the flesh" with sincerity and in fear of the Lord, confident in the divine inheritance they will receive. Finally, masters should grant to their slaves what is just and fair, in the knowledge that they themselves have a Lord in heaven. Notably, the Colossian Christians are here instructed according to patterns of behavior as members of conventional social classes.¹³⁷ The application of the household code reflects the theological presupposition that the Colossians' new life in Christ must be conducted within the framework of existing natural and social orders, and specifies how it is to do so.¹³⁸ The lordship of Christ, a key theme for the letter, which is expressed primarily in cosmological and soteriological terms, extends here to daily family relationships.¹³⁹

Furthermore, exhortation tailored for specific social groups and their respective obligations speaks to the necessity, often felt in the ancient moral literature, for specialized or personalized instruction, as the teacher demonstrates an awareness of the distinct needs of the audience being addressed.¹⁴⁰ What special motives the author of Colossians may have had in mind when incorporating this code into

¹³⁶ See Wilson, *Mysteries*, 7-8, 119 ff. For analysis of the passage in Colossians see the commentaries, also Marlis Gielen, *Tradition und Theologie neutestamentlicher Haus-tafelethik: Ein Beitrag zur Frage eine christlichen Auseinandersetzung mit gesellschaftlichen Normen* (BBB 75; Frankfurt am Main: Hain, 1990) 105-203.

¹³⁷ On the inclusion of wives, children, and slaves in the discussion of obligations, and the moral and social implications of such inclusion, see Franz Laub, "Sozialgeschichtlicher Hintergrund und ekklesiologische Relevanz der neutestamentlich-frühchristlichen Haus- und Gemeinde-Tafelparänese – ein Beitrag zur Soziologie des Frühchristentums," *MTZ* 37 (1986) 249-271.

¹³⁸ Cf. Pokorny, *Colossians*, 178: "The life of Christians takes place prior to the unveiling of the true life with Christ in God. The Christian lives his or her life in the old world. The believers' missions-oriented, apologetic accommodation to the world around them is not maintained with the intention of immortalizing the existing societal order. It is to demonstrate that in their otherness Christians do not threaten their fellow citizens. It is not merely an apologetic motif. This kind of communication with the world around is essentially part of the gospel."

¹³⁹ Cf. James E. Crouch, *The Origin and Intention of the Colossian Haustafel* (FRLANT 2.109; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972) 145-146.

¹⁴⁰ See below, pp. 54-55, 59.

the epistle are still a matter of scholarly conjecture. Many critics posit an apologetic function for the *Haustafel*, insofar as the letter-writer seems to defend the church against real or potential charges that as an institution it promotes antisocial attitudes and poses a threat to public order. Conceivably a missionary objective could have been linked secondarily with this function (cf. 4.3-6). It is also possible to detect a polemical thrust here. The sorts of attitudes recommended by the code may have been designed either to correct the disruptive impact that the religious practices of the philosophy were having on the community, or simply to counter the indifference of its proponents to such matters.

Moral Training and Epistolary Communication

Another formal factor that is critical for interpreting the moral challenge imparted by Colossians has to do with its literary genre, that is, the nature and function of the text as an example of ancient epistolary communication. In order to address this issue adequately, we need to examine the letter within the context of Hellenistic letter-writing more comprehensively. Significantly, the large majority of Greco-Roman letters that are characterized by exhortation of the sort described above originate from philosophic circles of one kind or another, and so it is necessary to begin this aspect of the discussion with some preliminary remarks about the place of letter-writing in the philosophic schools.

Generally speaking, the tradents of a particular philosophic movement, whatever it might be, were summoned to adhere to a distinct explanation of human purpose which was in some manner counter to the prevailing opinions and patterns of society. This meant that the way of life plotted by the philosophy's teachings would often prove to be arduous and controversial. It was imperative, therefore, that like-minded individuals within the movement maintain contact with one another in order to avoid feelings of isolation and the demoralizing effects they might have. This was particularly the case when students were separated for a time from their teacher-mentor, and so were rendered especially vulnerable. In this situation, the regular exchange of information and support through letters and messengers was essential to continuing the overall program of personalized guidance.¹⁴¹ The employment of letters as part of this program

¹⁴¹ Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter-Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (LEC 5; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986) 36-40; cf. Margaret M. Mitchell, "New Testament Envoys in the Context of Greco-Roman Diplomatic and Epistolary Conventions: The Example of Timothy and Titus," *JBL* 111 (1992) 641-662.

of communication was consistent with the prevailing self-understanding of the philosophic groups as institutions that not only preserved a distinct body of teaching but also and especially demonstrated how this teaching should inform everyday decision-making. In Hellenistic circles, a letter containing moral exhortation would have been immediately recognizable as a conventional form of philosophic discourse, particularly if it was designed as a plea for the audience to adopt or to maintain a particular course of action that was of mutual interest to all parties. The written correspondence would serve, in part, as a mechanism for strengthening certain vital social bonds between the writer and the recipients during trying times.¹⁴² In this manner the teacher-mentor could continue to shape the moral character of the students without being physically present. We can see in this light that the central objective of philosophic epistles is not so much to pass on new doctrines, but to affect the habits and disposition of the readers in accordance with teachings and models provided by the school. This focus on influencing the moral direction of the recipients meant that the philosophic epistolary tradition exhibited a decidedly persuasive bent, and it comes as no surprise that the systematic study of epistolary theory during the Greco-Roman era by and large came under the auspices of the field of rhetoric.¹⁴³

Ancient epistolary communication, in theory at least, was meant to take on a number of predictable features that would aid in fulfilling these basic objectives. For instance, according to ancient opinion a letter-writer ought to present himself as if speaking in person and directly to the recipients. An effective letter, by means of its literary fiction, should make the writer personally accessible to the readers in a manner that would be consistent with their expectations of his or her character, as it provides instruction of an individualized nature.¹⁴⁴ In line with this, letters were generally designed to make a more immediate, more engaging impact than other forms of written communication: ideally they should exhibit the trappings of a real speech or conversation.¹⁴⁵ Insofar as a letter in this manner contains

¹⁴² On exhortation in letters see Wilson, *Love*, 55, n. 38.

¹⁴³ For an overview of the relevant literature see Frank W. Hughes, *Early Christian Rhetoric and 2 Thessalonians* (JSNTSup 30; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989) 19-50.

¹⁴⁴ On this feature, generally known as *παρουσία*, see Heikki Koskenniemi, *Studien zur Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes bis 400 n. Chr.* (Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae B.102.2; Helsinki: Finnischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1956) 38-42; Klaus Thraede, *Grundzüge griechisch-römischer Brieffotopik* (Zetemata 48; München: C.H. Beck, 1970) 52-55, 64, 70-71, 95 ff., 146 ff.

¹⁴⁵ On *ὁμιλία* in letters see Koskenniemi, *Studien*, 42-47; Thraede, *Brieffotopik*, 83-84, 152-153, 182-185.

an image of its creator, it displays the author's personal interest in the welfare of the readers and the desire to nourish a mutually beneficial relationship.¹⁴⁶ Consequently, epistolary exchanges by and large take on a friendly, "philophronetic" tone, and letter-writing in general was conceived as a facet and extension of friendship between correspondents.¹⁴⁷ On account of the author's bona fide commitment to the welfare and progress of the readers, therefore, he or she will not hesitate to correct, admonish, or rebuke them when necessary, in order to save them from error. Hence philosophic correspondence typically balances praise and positive exhortation with warnings and negative exhortation, often even within the same letter.¹⁴⁸

The history of the early church evidences a tradition, established, it seems, primarily by the apostle Paul, of letter-writing as an instrument of moral instruction.¹⁴⁹ In adopting this practice early Christianity would have resembled a philosophic school. This ecclesial tradition continued after the death of the apostle himself in the form of pseudonymous letters,¹⁵⁰ which represented a mode of communication that was widespread and important in the philosophic traditions as well.¹⁵¹ Composed in the name of famous figures such as Socrates or Heraclitus, pseudonymous letters sought to recreate vividly the personality of the dead sage, making him accessible as an embodiment of the type of philosophic vocation propagated by the

¹⁴⁶ Thraede, *Brieftopik*, 157-161.

¹⁴⁷ On φιλοφρόνησις in letters see Anne-Marie Guillemin, *Pline et la Vie Littéraire de son Temps* (Collection d'Études Latines 4; Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1929) 2-56; Koskenniemi, *Studien*, 35-37; Thraede, *Brieftopik*, 24-27, 37-38, 44-45, 65, 72, 125-146; cf. below, p. 62, n. 57.

¹⁴⁸ Benjamin Fiore, *The Function of Personal Example in the Socratic and Pastoral Epistles* (AnBib 105; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1986) 86, n. 27, refers to Cicero, *De Amicitia* 13.44, Ilsetraut Hadot, *Seneca und die griechisch-römische Tradition der Seelenleitung* (Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Philosophie 13; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1969) 66; cf. Stowers, *Letter-Writing*, with the discussion of letters of friendship (pp. 58-70) and paraenetic letters (pp. 94-106).

¹⁴⁹ For overviews of early Christian epistolary literature see John L. White, "New Testament Epistolary Literature in the Framework of Ancient Epistolography," *ANRW* II.25.2 (1984) 1730-1756; David E. Aune, *The New Testament in its Literary Environment* (LEC 8; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987) 158-225.

¹⁵⁰ Lewis R. Donelson, *Pseudepigraphy and Ethical Argument in the Pastoral Epistles* (HUT 22; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1986) 7-54; David G. Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon: An Investigation into the Relationship of Authorship and Authority in Jewish and Earliest Christian Tradition* (WUNT 39; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1986) 116-161; Richard Bauckham, "Pseudo-Apostolic Letters," *JBL* 107 (1988) 469-494.

¹⁵¹ On the school setting of pseudepigraphical writings see Donelson, *Pseudepigraphy*, 23-42; Fiore, *Personal Example*, 108-110; M. Luther Stirewalt, *Studies in Ancient Greek Epistolography* (SBLRBS 27; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993) 20-42; cf. Müller, *Anfänge*, 305-320.

movement. This reflects in part the premium that the schools placed on personal authority, especially that of the historic founders of their movements. For this reason, biographical data, often in memoir form, can support the exhortatory purpose of a pseudonymous paraenetic letter, illustrating in the sage a fusion of λόγος and βίος achieved according to the movement's distinct ideological commitments.¹⁵² Pseudonymous letters of this sort want to preserve the master's teachings and example in written form in such a manner that they can speak to and become actualized in the lives of current readers, who may be living under conditions that differ substantially from anything the presumed author could have personally anticipated. Sometimes the message of such a letter is developed in a situation of controversy wherein the authoritative voice of the master may be felt to have some decisive input. At the same time, it was not impossible for exhortatory epistles to devise for themselves false addressees as well. The so-called Cynic Epistles, for instance, while addressed fictitiously to a variety of specific figures from the past, in fact have a wider, contemporary audience in view. Thus these texts create epistolary exchanges that impart to the intended audience indirect (rather than direct) exhortation. In a sense, the readers are eavesdropping on an edifying conversation of the past. They are to recognize in an exchange ostensibly intended for someone else values and recommendations that apply to their own situation, owing to the general authority of the speaker and the timeless validity of what is said. In Chapter Two, we will turn our attention to the authority and self-presentation of the author of Colossians as "Paul," and explore some of the ways in which the artistically constructed image of the apostle contributes to the letter's instructional character and moral intent.

¹⁵² Fiore, *Personal Example*, 131; cf. Abraham J. Malherbe, "Exhortation in I Thessalonians," *NovT* 25 (1983) 247; also Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 40.12, 52.8, 100.11.

CHAPTER TWO

ACCORDING TO GOD'S COMMISSION

At the beginning of one of his moral discourses, Dio Chrysostom expresses the common opinion that the authentic philosopher ought to be in all matters and in all circumstances superior to the rest of humankind. In fact, anyone who would be devoted to philosophy must take on a special kind of life (βίος), distinct from that of the average citizen, a life directed towards wisdom, virtue, and piety, one with its own principles, studies, and regimen.¹ Ancient educators largely concurred that it was almost impossible to achieve such a high level of existence alone, even if one was already considerably advanced within the educational program of a philosophic school. In a world full of distractions and confusing claims, the individual who wanted to make meaningful progress with his or her training in the philosophic βίος required a teacher, counselor, and advocate of the highest possible standards – someone who could point out the truth, reject falsehood, and provide the necessary support.² In order to be effective in such a climate of expectations, the authors of philosophic paraenesis strived to show themselves to be not only knowledgeable and respected instructors, but also trustworthy and concerned guardians. Such efforts reflect the critical role that the teacher played in the indoctrination of neophytes and their assimilation of a school's ethos and worldview.

To the extent that the epistle to the Colossians participated in the same general historical environment and assumed comparable objectives in terms of the allegiance and development expected of its addressees, the presentation of its author can be investigated in light of the ideas embraced by these philosophic guides. In order to analyze Colossians effectively in this manner, some general remarks are in order regarding the persona of the Hellenistic philosopher as a moral educator and spiritual director. As we will see, the self-presentation of these authors reveals some important features as to their respective educational agendas and the techniques utilized to convey and enact these agendas.

¹ Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 71.1-2, cf. 70.7-8.

² E.g., Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 94.52-59.

The Philosopher as Moral Guide

It would be fair to assume that the sort of constructive personal relationship necessary for a successful paraenetic exchange ordinarily relied upon actual prior contact between the parties involved; and indeed paraenetic texts sometimes allude to previous events associated with such interaction as reminders that help establish the authority of the writer.³ However, in many cases (as with most pseudepigraphical paraenetic letters, for instance) the putative author is in no position to assume this type of personal relationship. The writer's general reputation, together with the case made by the text itself, must suffice to establish his pedagogical warrant and stance.⁴ In this variety of discourse, the ostensible author ordinarily represents an esteemed figure within the social group of the addressees, even the founder of their movement, someone who is older, wiser, and more experienced.⁵ In assuming the persona of teacher-mentor, the philosopher takes on the function of a sage, someone who transmits and verifies the venerable teachings of the past. Seneca, to name one, understands himself to be preserving a philosophic *hereditas* ("inheritance") for his students, a heritage of wisdom passed on from generation to generation.⁶

In this vein, it may be accurate to say that much ancient moral exhortation, including that of Pauline Christianity, tends to take on the characteristics and style of classroom instruction.⁷ In accordance with this, the authors of most philosophic letters try to recreate the face-to-face encounter associated with this sort of pedagogical experience. Because students in the earliest stages of spiritual growth are not yet fully capable of independently adjudicating the soundness of

³ E.g., Epicurus, *Epistula ad Menoeceum* 123; Cicero, *Epistulae ad Familiares* 6.1.3-5.

⁴ Though of course the letter-writer may still devise fictional contacts between the putative author and the putative addressee(s), e.g., Pseudo-Crates, *Epistulae* 20, 30; Pseudo-Diogenes, *Epistulae* 25, 26, 38; *Socraticorum Epistulae* 25.

⁵ David Sedley ("Philosophical Allegiance in the Greco-Roman World," *Philosophia Togata: Essays on Philosophy and Roman Society* [ed. Miriam Griffin and Jonathan Barnes; Oxford: Clarendon, 1989] 97-119), for instance, describes how in Epicureanism the virtually religious commitment of students to the authority of their founder figure gives the movement cohesion and identity; cf. Diskin Clay, "The Cults of Epicurus," *Cronache Ercolanesi* 16 (1986) 11-28.

⁶ Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 64.7 (cf. 40.3). Also noteworthy in the context of this discussion is the opinion, widely shared by Hellenistic thinkers, that philosophy originated in the earliest period of human civilization, a view that motivated their search for primordial wisdom and early traditions. Consequently, there was a tendency in Greek thought "which viewed all 'recent' philosophy as degenerate and called for the repristination of philosophy or a return to its sources." Droge, *Homer*, 147, also s.v. philosophy.

⁷ Stanley K. Stowers, "Social Status, Public Speaking and Private Teaching: The Circumstances of Paul's Preaching Activity," *NovT* 26 (1984) 59-82.

philosophic doctrines, they must rely on the credibility, authority, and concern of their instructor for guidance.⁸ The primary mission of the teacher in this context was to assist students in overcoming their conditions of ignorance, misunderstanding, and self-deception through effective indoctrination and schooling in the truth – the truth as it pertained to the world in general and to human flourishing in particular.⁹

But this concern to impart the truth was not without a certain problematic, since in the opinion of antiquity such human objectives as a comprehensive understanding of reality or the pursuit of the virtuous life were not items simply to be had through everyday effort, but required access to the divine (however that might be defined), the ultimate source of wisdom and virtue.¹⁰ Hence moral philosophers frequently submitted their teachings as a form of revelation. This phenomenon fostered among the general public an image of the philosopher as a holy and spiritual person, someone inspired or even sent by the gods to divulge the truth and assist others.¹¹ In this vein, an educator like the legendary Chiron the Centaur could be held up as an archetype. He was not only a wise and morally upright figure, but also a prophetic, semi-divine being who instructed his followers in secret rites and mysteries. Chiron's teaching was effective because it spoke both to his students' physical needs as well as to the nurturing of their souls, the latter accomplished through educational aids like poems and hymns. In a manner coinciding with ancient pedagogical norms, the substance and aim of his program was guided by a grasp of ultimate reality; consequently his manner of philosophizing took the formation of the whole person into consideration.¹²

To take another example: the "self-presentation" of the author in Pseudo-Socrates, *Epistulae* 1, written perhaps during the first century AD, shares in this same general pool of expectations for the ancient

⁸ I. Hadot, "The Spiritual Guide," *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman* (ed. A.H. Armstrong; World Spirituality 15; New York: Crossroad, 1986) 445-449.

⁹ On philosophy as training in the art of life see, e.g., Samuel Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius* (London, New York: Macmillan, 1905) 289 ff.; Hijmans, "Ασκησις," 33-37; Clarence E. Glad, *Paul and Philodemus: Adaptability in Epicurean and Early Christian Psychagogy* (NovTSup 81; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995) 58-60. On philosophy and *paideia* see Wilson, *Mysteries*, 197-199 (with references).

¹⁰ Wilson, *Mysteries*, 163-177.

¹¹ In addition to the sources cited below see Rutherford, *Meditations*, 178-181, 192-195; Anderson, *Sage*, 42-49, 54-57, 73-85.

¹² Robert Turcan, "Chiron le Mystagogue: Un Sarcophage d'Enfant," *Mélanges d'Archéologie, d'Epigraphie et d'Histoire, Offerts à Jérôme Carcopino* (Paris: Hachette, 1966) 927-939; Hadot, "Spiritual Guide," 436-441; also analogous are a number of the figures surveyed by Hans Dieter Betz, "Gottmensch II: Griechisch-römische Antike und Urchristentum," *RAC* 12 (1983) 234-288.

sage. The philosopher here claims to be appointed and taught by god, who is his counselor. Socrates' obligation, therefore, is to obey and reveal god's will. This responsibility forms the basis of his religious and moral instruction, which he pronounces publicly regardless of human apathy or opposition.¹³ What we see is that, by and large, the teaching of sages like Socrates, owing to the nature of their vocation, takes on universal dimensions; these venerable figures become, in effect, the tutors of all humankind.¹⁴

In the circles of Hellenistic philosophy, the main activity connected with this type of divinely-informed assistance was to provide a sort of spiritual "therapy" for the insidious beliefs that neophytes brought with them into the movement and for the personal distress and vice that stemmed from such beliefs. Because the medical model for philosophy takes seriously and is actively engaged with curing particular illnesses, and not simply with abstract ideas about illness in general, the philosopher will determine the norm of health and the necessary treatment with the condition of each patient in mind. He must, therefore, be an expert in human nature, someone who grasps the intellectual, psychological, moral, and spiritual complexities of the human personality. Martha Nussbaum's comments indicate some of the major concerns for Hellenistic philosophy's therapeutic approach:

medical philosophy, while committed to logical reasoning, and to marks of good reasoning such as clarity, consistency, rigor, and breadth of scope, will often need to search for techniques that are more complicated and indirect, more psychologically engaging, than those of conventional deductive or dialectical argument. It must find ways to delve into the pupil's inner world, using gripping examples, techniques of narrative, appeals to memory and imagination – all in the service of bringing the pupil's whole life into the investigative process.¹⁵

¹³ See esp. Pseudo-Socrates, *Epistulae* 1.2, 7; *Socraticorum Epistulae* 8, 10, 12.

¹⁴ Dio Chrysostom (*Orationes* 13.14) characterizes the preaching of Socrates as follows: "I have had recourse to an ancient appeal made by Socrates, one which he never ceased making, everywhere and to everyone (πανταχοῦ τε καὶ πρὸς ἅπαντας), crying out and declaiming earnestly, in the wrestling schools and in the Lyceum and at the workshops and up and down the market-place, like a *deus ex machina*." Cf. 13.10-11, 49.3, 77/78.40. A more universal scope of mission is indicated by Epictetus' depiction (*Diatribae* 3.22.81-82) of the ideal Cynic, who "has made all people (πάντας ἀνθρώπους) his children...thus he approaches them all (πᾶσιν) and cares for them all (πάντων). Or do you think it is in the spirit of idle impertinence that he reviles everyone (ἀπαντῶσιν)? It is as a father he acts, as a brother, and as a servant (ὑπηρέτης) of God, our common Father." Cf. 3.22.77; Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 73.7, 89.13; Apollonius, *Epistulae* 44; Philo, *De Virtutibus* 175; Anderson, *Sage*, 46-47.

¹⁵ Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Martin Classical Lectures N.S. 2; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) 35, cf. 13 ff.

Since the disorder of irrational belief that cripples a patient's soul is not innate, but is something acquired and learned in particular circumstances, the philosopher must also be a student of human culture, specifically a critic of societal values and popular opinion who seeks higher criteria for human well-being.¹⁶

The philosopher, then, is not just an instructor or oracle, but a leader, role-model, and care-provider. In the language of socialization, the sage serves as a "significant other": as aspirants develop a strong affective bond with their teacher, they abstract from his or her teachings and example a new comprehension of reality with new patterns of belief and behavior. This aids neophytes in the process of separating from their previous community, with its traditions, social structures, and values, and of being inducted into the special worldview of the philosophic movement, acquiring its wisdom, ethos, and norms.¹⁷ In this scheme of things, instruction in the truth as revealed in correct philosophic dogma can be taken as a necessary first step, but it cannot be an end in itself. Through rigorous training guided by the master, who functions to verify proper ways of thinking and acting, students aim for the goal of knowledge as *habitus*, as they place everyday decisions and moral responsibilities within the horizon of the philosophic system.¹⁸

The manner of articulating the sort of revelation associated with philosophic therapy could vary considerably, though the adoption of language and categories familiar from the realm of the religious was natural and typical. For example, a wide range of Greco-Roman moralists, and even philosophically-minded Jews like Philo and Pseudo-Phocylides, utilized concepts borrowed from the mystery cults, which were employed metaphorically to clarify the nature of their philosophic inquiries.¹⁹ Underlying such discussions was the key notion that one must somehow become "initiated" into certain spiri-

¹⁶ Nussbaum, *Therapy*, 26-29, 44-45, 322, 327-328.

¹⁷ On this theme see Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966) 121 ff., 137 ff.; Leo G. Perdue, "The Social Character of Paraenesis and Paraenetic Literature," *Semeia* 50 (1990) 14-15, 24; Jerome D. Quinn, "Paraenesis and the Pastoral Epistles: Lexical Observations Bearing on the Nature of the Sub-genre and Soundings in its Role in Socialization and Liturgies," *Semeia* 50 (1990) 197.

¹⁸ For typical discussion of the relation between μάθησις and ἄσκησις see Musonius Rufus, *Fragmenta* 6; Epictetus, *Diatribae* 2.9.13-22; Hijmans, "Ἀσκησις," 64-91; Bernard Frischer, *The Sculpted Word: Epicureanism and Philosophical Recruitment in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) 35-36; John T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel: An Examination of the Catalogues of Hardships in the Corinthian Correspondence* (SBLDS 99; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 90-98; Hadot, "Spiritual Guide," 450-455.

¹⁹ Wilson, *Mysteries*, 158-174.

tual secrets in order both to grasp the truth concerning the moral life and to be capacitated to abide by such a life.²⁰ Insofar as the divine, in contrast to the mundane, was perceived to be “perfect” and complete, and the perfection of human existence through access to the divine was one of the crucial goals, the idiom of the mysteries often included terms with the *τελ* stem. To illustrate: those initiated into a mystery could be described as *τέλειος*, “perfect” or “mature;” they are the privileged few to whom the secrets of wisdom have been fully disclosed.²¹ Concurrently, a philosopher like Plato, speaking analogically, could contend that the individual who pursues philosophy becomes *τέλειος* only when his mind contemplates the divine, the Good, and so is “always being initiated into perfect mysteries.”²² In this mode of education and enlightenment, the philosophic teacher was truly a spiritual director, someone who mediated the revelation of divine truths to his or her students, being guided by divine power and purpose, in a process that was likened to that of a mystery cult.²³

One way that the inspired status assumed by many philosophers exhibited itself was in the large measure of authority, confidence, and courage with which they delivered their message. As ancient people viewed things, the ideal philosopher was not afraid to defend the truth or to address openly the ills of society, even if this meant discomfort for his associates, confrontations with skeptics, or personal hardship for the philosopher. As part of their self-commendation to actual or potential followers, teachers might stress the fortitude they had to demonstrate in the face of disapproval or maltreatment. Philosophers regularly replied to charges that they were meddling busybodies by pointing to the ordeals that were part-and-parcel of their vocation, which they said proved their higher calling, their independence, and the invincibility of their reason. Enduring trouble nobly, in turn, reveals the sage to be a reliable guide for others who must confront comparable troubles in their own development. The experience of such hardships and resistance could be interpreted as part of a divine plan to utilize the sage as a pattern in this regard. Perseverance in grappling with difficulties manifests the otherworldly power present in the sage, something that distinguishes him from critics and opponents.²⁴

This perspective is informed by the underlying assumption that the moral character of an individual becomes visible for close inspec-

²⁰ Wilson, *Mysteries*, 161-167.

²¹ Wilson, *Mysteries*, 173, n. 86.

²² Plato, *Symposium* 209E-211C, *Phaedrus* 250B-C.

²³ Hadot, “Spiritual Guide,” 436-459.

²⁴ On these themes see Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 47 ff., and *passim*.

tion only in times of testing and adversity. Hardships expose a person's wisdom, integrity, training, and experience for their true value.²⁵ For this reason, the spiritual director not only should endure adversity and turn it to his advantage, overcoming the vicissitudes of fortune, but should recognize in adversity itself a gift from the gods, a benefaction that proves divine love and discipline to be working in the sage. Therefore the consummate philosopher is not merely serene in the midst of suffering, but, as Marcus Aurelius puts it, the sage ought even "to rejoice" (χαίρειν) in misfortune and ordeals since they prove and strengthen virtue.²⁶

In this context, the connection often evident in ancient literature between the occasion of delivering a paraenetic message and the occasion of the deliverer's impending death is noteworthy. It is plain that ancient people prized the moral counsel of a wise person as the latter's death approached or seemed imminent. The prominence of paraenesis in the testamental literature, for instance, testifies to this phenomenon.²⁷ The final words of the master represented the culmination of his life experience in the form of a sort of verbal legacy. One reason for the fascination with this type of literature was that the crisis posed by the impending death of the sage potentially threatens the integrity of his life and teaching, not to mention the community of followers that may depend upon his leadership.²⁸ The master's final instructions and exemplary death overcome this threat, while the memory of this legacy helps to maintain his influence and reinforce the community's resolve. The idea that the death of a philosopher proves, finally, the conformity of life to teaching is a prominent theme in moral exhortation, not only because it validates his philosophic testimony, but also because his death serves as a model for how others should themselves face death.²⁹ The philosopher in effect leads others to virtue through his manner of resoluteness. In the *Phaedo*, to take one example, Socrates' imprisonment and

²⁵ Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 42-43.

²⁶ Marcus Aurelius, *Ad Se Ipsum* 11.16, cf. 3.16.2; also Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 59-65, 70-72; Martin Ebner, *Leidenslisten und Apostelbrief: Untersuchungen zu Form, Motiwik und Funktion der Peristasenkataloge bei Paulus* (FB 56; Würzburg: Echter, 1991) 215-221.

²⁷ Max Küchler, *Frühjüdische Weisheitstraditionen: Zum Fortgang weisheitlichen Denkens im Bereich des frühjüdischen Jahweglaubens* (OBO 26; Freiburg [Schweiz]: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979) 415-545.

²⁸ Leo G. Perdue, "The Death of the Sage and Moral Exhortation: From Ancient Near Eastern Instructions to Greco-Roman Paraenesis," *Semeia* 50 (1990) 81-109. As Perdue observes, this literature does not necessarily relate the actual death of the master, but may focus instead on his or her symbolic death and absence, sometimes expressed by means of ritual or mythic language.

²⁹ Winfried Trillitzsch, *Senecas Beweisführung* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1962) 95-112; Cancik, *Untersuchungen*, 77, 111-114; Perdue, "Death of the Sage," 97, 99.

imminent demise as depicted by Plato provide the occasion for a paraenetic message, and the material here as a whole became the basis for the Socratic martyr legend, another feature that helped to immortalize his personal example and the influence of his teachings for future generations.³⁰

The oft-cited example of Socrates shows how the virtue of consistency in one's speech, actions, and principles in relation to some higher source of truth, evident particularly in the face of obstacles, was a necessity for the persona of the exemplary philosopher.³¹ In their *ἀγών*, philosophers recognize that they have been called by God and sent forth by God to perform a divine purpose.³² The sage is assigned by God a task that is especially important and difficult, becoming a divine tool for aiding others and leading them to the truth.³³ The sage, then, functions as a witness and servant of God and an example of what it means to follow and obey God steadfastly. As Epictetus puts it, the philosopher has been deemed worthy by God of a divine "service" (*ὑπηρεσία*) and "office" (*ἀρχή*);³⁴ in other words, the sage is a *ὑπηρέτης* and *διάκονος* of God.³⁵ In this capacity, philosophers envision themselves to be divinely enabled and commissioned for their special task; this is how they can overcome adversity and become effective leaders. As Seneca describes the situation, it is as though a divine power (*vis divina*) has descended upon the sage.³⁶ This determined the ultimate allegiance of the philosopher and the manner of his vocation.

This unwavering commitment to one's ideals and personal standards in relation to a divine office, though, needed to be matched

³⁰ Cf. Konrad Gaiser, *Protreptik und Paränese bei Platon: Untersuchungen zur Form des platonischen Dialogs* (TBAW 40; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1959) 85-86, 155, 185-186; Perdue, "Death of the Sage," 94-95; Arthur J. Droge and James D. Tabor, *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom Among Christians and Jews in Antiquity* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992) 17-51.

³¹ On consistency as a qualification for the sage see, for instance, Philo, *De Virtutibus* 184; Glad, *Paul*, 21-22.

³² On the *ἀγών* of the Hellenistic sage see Victor C. Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif: Traditional Athletic Imagery in the Pauline Literature* (NovTSup 16; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967) 23-72; cf. Ebner, *Leidenslisten*, 265-268.

³³ E.g., Epictetus, *Diatribae* 3.24.113, 4.4.30, 4.8.30-31, *Encheiridion* 22; Seneca, *De Providentia* 1.5-6; Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 75-82.

³⁴ Epictetus, *Diatribae* 1.9.16-17, 3.22.95, 3.24.113-114, 117, 4.8.32; cf. Plato, *Apologia* 30A; Seneca, *De Providentia* 1.6.

³⁵ E.g., Epictetus, *Diatribae* 3.22.69, 82, 95, 3.24.64-65; in 3.22.23-24, the sage is described as god's *ἄγγελος* and *κατάσκοπος*.

³⁶ Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 41.4, cf. 41.2, 53.11, 73.15-16, 87.19, 92.3-4, 93.10, 124.23; also Epictetus, *Diatribae* 1.29.46-49, 2.1.39, 3.1.36, 3.22.45-49, 56; Maximus of Tyre, *Orationes* 8.7; Wilhelm Ganss, *Das Bild des Weisen bei Seneca* (Freiburg, Schweiz: Buchdruckerei Gutenberg, Schaan, 1952) 38-47; Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 80-85.

with an ability to take into account the varied, and often vulnerable, psychological conditions of one's students.³⁷ A moral guide ought to lead others to divine wisdom plainly and frankly, without compromising the truth. But the philosopher's therapy needs to be administered in concrete situations with a dose of empathy, so as not to cause discouragement or resentment among one's followers. This would not have been at all easy in practice. The philosopher was obliged to deal with obstinacy and failure on the part of students at every turn. Accordingly, the master's words of instruction should not be abusive, spoken out of frustration or disdain, nor motivated by ambition, but delivered out of a sincere effort to rescue and nurture others who are willing to listen and learn.³⁸ It would have been simple enough within the dynamic of this relationship for the mentor to offer pupils nothing but adulation and in this way gain goodwill, but the philosopher's boldness and frankness were critical when correction was called for.³⁹ So while praise and encouragement constituted regular elements of the hortatory style, circumstances might dictate that the teacher correct, admonish, or reprimand his followers,⁴⁰ adapting the mode of speech to suit best the different types of people and situations involved.⁴¹ There was also widespread agreement that individualized advice and correction achieved better results; as Philo notes,

[i]f the exhortations (παραινέσεις) are received as a personal message, the hearer is more ready to obey, but if collectively with others, he is deaf to them, since he takes the multitude as a cover for disobedience.⁴²

³⁷ Malherbe, "Hellenistic Moralists," 301-304; Glad, *Paul*, 36-52, 236 ff.

³⁸ See Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 103-107, and Glad, *Paul*, 78-81, 137-152 for numerous examples, to which we may add Iamblichus, *De Vita Pythagorica* 22.101, on the Pythagoreans' mode of education: "Corrections and admonitions ... they thought ought to be delivered with much caution and respect by elders to those younger, and that much solicitude and fellowship should be shown in the admonitions; for thus the admonition is both kind and beneficial."

³⁹ E.g., Plato, *Gorgias* 487A-B; Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 9.7-9, 72.9, 77/78.41-42, 45; Philo, *Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres* 19-21. On the *παρησσία* of the philosopher, a manifestation of his *φιλανθρωπία*, see Abraham J. Malherbe, "'Gentle as a Nurse': The Cynic Background to I Thess ii," *NovT* 12 (1970) 208-217; idem, "Hellenistic Moralists," 296-297; Rutherford, *Meditations*, 143-147; Glad, *Paul*, 104-124.

⁴⁰ On admonition and correction as a necessary component of the philosopher's task, see, e.g., Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 8.5, 33.10, 77/78.38, 42; Epictetus, *Diatribae* 2.22.36, *Encheiridion* 42. On the "philotropeic method," which mixes gentle and harsh elements of persuasion, see Glad, *Paul*, 69-98.

⁴¹ That ethical arguments must be responsive to the particular cases and circumstances of those addressed: Abraham J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophic Tradition of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 57, n. 86; idem, "Hellenistic Moralists," 302, nn. 161-162; Nussbaum, *Therapy*, 65-69, 125-128, 298-300, 335-341; Glad, *Paul*, 60-69, 137-152.

⁴² Philo, *De Decalogo* 39, cf. *Legum Allegoriae* 1.93-94.

This willingness to correct others meant that in the end philosophers were not necessarily popular figures. Often they rightly viewed themselves as in opposition to the bulk of society, whose members resisted reform.⁴³ In general, it was incumbent upon the philosophers to demonstrate over and over how their own decisions conformed with their teachings and with their dedication to assisting others. This often necessitated on their part a fair amount of self-description, self-defense, and self-promotion. As John Fitzgerald writes, in the context of philosophic paraenesis, this sort of discourse could also "prove extremely helpful as a pedagogical device for giving hope to the despairing, admonition to the overconfident, and instruction to the ignorant."⁴⁴ In order to educate others cogently and with authority, the teacher needed to become the quintessence of what he or she taught, and to convince others of this fact. This was particularly critical in a culture where charges of hypocrisy were commonplace.⁴⁵ Philosophers, as a result, could by no means be shy about holding forth their own lives or episodes from the lives of other sages for inspection.⁴⁶ Such (auto)biographical information served the purposes of apologetic in some cases,⁴⁷ but more often the vignettes were carefully selected and constructed so as to provide a concrete model for readers to emulate. "The influence of the ancient rhetorical tradition," as George Lyons points out, "made moral persuasion a higher value than historical truth" for writers of this brand of literature. For this reason ancient (auto)biographies were chiefly concerned with "ethical characterization and edification."⁴⁸ To be credible, the philosopher had to embody the sorts of virtues to which neophytes should aspire. His example proves that the sort of life promoted by the philosophy, though difficult, is in fact possible. In the *De Vita Pythagorica*, for instance, Iamblichus depicts the master as a paradigm of wisdom, moderation, courage, justice, piety, and friendship, and then calls upon the readers themselves to order their lives according to such categories.⁴⁹

⁴³ On the public ridicule endured by the philosophers see, e.g., Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 72.2, 7; Plutarch, *De Profectibus in Virtute* 78B-C; Pseudo-Socrates, *Epistulae* 1; also see below, pp. 154-157.

⁴⁴ Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 111; cf. Plutarch, *De Laude Ipsius* 544D-546B.

⁴⁵ Wilson, *Love*, 153, n. 13.

⁴⁶ The basic study is Fiore, *Personal Example*, 84 ff., 132 ff., and passim; cf. Cancik, *Untersuchungen*, 68-113; Robert J. Newman, "Cotidie Meditare: Theory and Practice of the *meditatio* in Imperial Stoicism," *ANRW* II.36.3 (1989) 1491-1493.

⁴⁷ Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 14-15, 24-25, 28-33, 57 ff.

⁴⁸ George Lyons, *Pauline Autobiography: Toward a New Understanding* (SBLDS 73; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985) 60, cf. 67-68.

⁴⁹ On this text see John Dillon and Jackson Hershbell, eds., *Iamblichus: On the*

In imparting personal illustrations of this type (and as the example just cited demonstrates), it was not considered necessary for the teacher to be present physically. The main point was not actual observation, but that the mentor's example remain constantly in the pupils' thoughts, a subject for contemplation. In this capacity, the moral guide functioned as a witness, a sort of alter ego, seemingly watching and directing the actions of the students even when absent or deceased.⁵⁰ Example and self-example in this pedagogical mode could also be conveyed implicitly and indirectly, without actually summoning the students to imitation. In this case, the guide simply suggests or implies certain analogies that might prove useful for their decision-making. Besides self-example, of course, the philosopher could be counted on to provide other personal examples for consideration, both positive and negative.⁵¹ In *De Profectibus in Virtute* 84B-85D, for example, Plutarch recommends that the reader emulate the virtuous individuals of the past, especially those who had overcome hardships (such as imprisonment), and reflect on how they might have responded to a situation like the one now facing the student.⁵²

At the same time, moral philosophers, like all public figures, were obliged to shape their self-promotion in a manner that was consistent with contemporaneous sensibilities. Speech about oneself (περι-αυτολογία) "was generally viewed as offensive and excitative of envy and hatred."⁵³ In his tractate *De Laude Ipsi*, Plutarch suggests for the public speaker a number of "antidotes" to self-glorification that make the practice justifiable and even seem necessary.⁵⁴ Several of the items there are worth mentioning in the context of our analysis of Paul's persona in the epistle to the Colossians. According to Plutarch, self-praise is rendered palatable and effective when it is conducted in the context of self-defense (540C-541A), in situations of

Pythagorean Way of Life. Text, Translation, and Notes (SBLTT 29, Graeco-Roman Religion Series 11; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991); cf. Michael von Albrecht, "Das Menschenbild in Iamblichs Darstellung der pythagoreischen Lebensformen," *Antike und Abendland* 12 (1966) 51-63.

⁵⁰ Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 11.8-10 and Malherbe, *Paul*, 53, n. 77; cf. Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 6.5, 25.4-5, 62.2-3, 102.30, 104.21-22; Epictetus, *Encheiridion* 33.12, 46.1-2, 51.3.

⁵¹ For the use of indirect models see, e.g., Epictetus, *Diatribae* 1.10.7-13, 1.18.15-16, 1.21.1-4; Fiore, *Personal Example*, 87-97, 143-146.

⁵² Cf. Fiore, *Personal Example*, 67-77; Rutherford, *Meditations*, 55-59; Nussbaum, *Therapy*, 338-341.

⁵³ Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 109.

⁵⁴ On the treatise see Heinz G. Ingenkamp, *Plutarchs Schriften über die Heilung der Seele* (Hypomnemata 34; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971) 62-69; Hans Dieter Betz, "De Laude Ipsi (Moralia 539A-547F)," *Plutarch's Ethical Writings and Early Christian Literature* (ed. idem; SCHNT 4; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978) 367-393; cf. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 11.1.15-28; Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 57.1-12.

adversity or peril (541A-C), and/or when initiated with a view to the benefit of others (544C-546A). In such circumstances it is appropriate to give credit to God for one's virtue and success (541C, 542E-543A, 543C), and to mingle praise of oneself with praise for others (542B-C). In this way the philosopher's mode of self-promotion not only meets with the principles of decorum, but can be consistent with the ideals of spiritual guidance and may help to distinguish the sage from a vaunting braggart or a boorish impostor.

Because good teachers embody their philosophy and identify personally with its success, they frequently develop close ties with their followers, those who share their difficult path. Oftentimes the teacher is the individual who introduced the aspirant into the philosophic school and mediated the process of initiation, furnishing essential aid in assuming the new roles and obligations connected with it. The guidance of the master at such a critical transitional period in life helps to establish strong bonds with the initiate. The philosopher, as a consequence, will exhibit an ongoing interest in maintaining and developing this initial commitment of the student, no doubt at least in part because the student's progress is a reflection of the teacher's ability.⁵⁵ Thus moral educators of antiquity emphasized the interests that they share with their pupils – they should have the same griefs and joys, the same enemies and the same friends.⁵⁶

In fact, many of the ideals associated with friendship (φιλία, *amicitia*), a prominent theme in moral literature, inform the teacher-student relationship itself.⁵⁷ In a sea of deceivers, hypocrites, and fools, the friend is someone to be trusted and confided in at all situations.⁵⁸ A friend is consistent, unwavering, and fully committed, even in times of trouble. It should be noted in this context that in the opinion of ancient writers friends are not necessarily equals, nor do they necessarily even know each other.⁵⁹ Like a friend, teachers some-

⁵⁵ Hijmans, "Ασκησις, 92-102.

⁵⁶ In his description of the Cynic philosopher, Epictetus (*Diatribae* 3.22.62-66) observes that such an individual will in fact have very few friends, since only those who share his way of life with all its hardships will be deemed worthy (ἄξιος) of such friendship. Pliny effectively conveys the ideal of the mentor-friend in his depiction of Corellius Rufus in *Epistulae* 4.17.

⁵⁷ See Glad, *Paul*, 161-181 for discussion and literature, to which add Jean-Claude Fraisse, *Philia: La Notion d'Amitié dans la Philosophie Antique: Essai sur un Problème Perdu et Retrouvé* (Bibliothèque d'Histoire de la Philosophie; Paris: J. Vrin, 1974) 287 ff. (on Epicureanism), 333 ff. (on Stoicism).

⁵⁸ Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 3.1-6, for instance, emphasizes trust as the basis of friendship; cf. 6.1-7, 9.1-22, 35.1-4; Iamblichus, *De Vita Pythagorica* 22.102; Cicero, *De Officiis* 1.17.58; Cancik, *Untersuchungen*, 61-66; Hadot, *Seneca*, 164-176; also above, p. 49, n. 147.

⁵⁹ Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea* 8.7 ff.

times display affection for their students, perhaps using fraternal language or indicating their personal feelings. As in friendship, success in the task of moral guidance relies on honesty and openness. To be sure, friends praise and encourage one another, but unlike a self-serving flatterer, they will mingle praise with correction and chastisement when necessary, though usually such censure will be indirect, tempered so as not to cause offense.⁶⁰ In this way friends help one another rectify moral errors without risking a disruption of their association. Teachers, like friends, pray for their students, suffer for them when necessary, rejoice over their accomplishments, and respond promptly to their difficulties, encouraging them to overcome obstacles.

Because periods of separation can often strain a friendship, it is essential that information and concerns be exchanged in a spirit of reciprocity.⁶¹ By maintaining contact through letters and mutual acquaintances, a friend can in a sense be present though absent.⁶² Philosophic letters frequently avail themselves of friendship *topoi*, especially insofar as friendship was believed to provide an appropriate context for moral guidance.⁶³ Friends advise and assist each other not so much through behests and commands, but in a spirit of constructive cooperation, a striving towards a set of mutual goals. It is even appropriate in an epistolary setting for friends to reveal private thoughts and feelings as they relate to achieving these goals.⁶⁴

In drawing this survey to a close, we may include for comparison Philostratus' lengthy biography of the Neopythagorean philosopher Apollonius of Tyana, which exhibits a number of the features associated with the Hellenistic picture of the ideal moral guide.⁶⁵ Philostratus depicts Apollonius as a prophet and spiritual teacher who is benevolent to his friends and disciples, helps others, and

⁶⁰ E.g., Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 25.1 ff.; cf. Plutarch, *Quomodo Adulator ab Amico Internoscatur* 53C, 55A-E; Maximus of Tyre, *Orationes* 14.1 ff.; on indirect censure see Benjamin Fiore, "Covert Allusion in I Corinthians 1-4," *CBQ* 47 (1985) 85-98.

⁶¹ On the exchange of letters as part of a comprehensive program of moral guidance see Fiore, *Personal Example*, 128-132.

⁶² E.g., Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 32.1, 40.1, 55.11, 64.1, 67.2, 75.1; Cicero, *Epistulae ad Familiares* 3.11.2; Malherbe, *Paul*, 72, n. 38.

⁶³ Cancik, *Untersuchungen*, 61-66; Thraede, *Brieftopik*, 125-146, 157-161; Koskeniemi, *Studien*, 35-37, 115-127; Hadot, *Seneca*, 164-176; Fiore, *Personal Example*, 86-89, 94-96, 121-124.

⁶⁴ E.g., Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 27.1; Cicero, *Epistulae ad Familiares* 7.1.6; cf. Hadot, *Seneca*, 164 ff.; Cancik, *Untersuchungen*, 46 ff. A stock epistolary theme is the *πόθος* ("longing") of the author for the reader, which could be tied to appeals for attention and action: Malherbe, "Exhortation," 242, n. 20.

⁶⁵ Graham Anderson, *Philostratus: Biography and Belles Lettres in the Third Century AD* (London: Croom Helm, 1986) 121 ff.

preaches to anyone who will listen. During periods of separation he communicates with his followers by means of philosophic letters.⁶⁶ His wise teachings preserve ancient ideals, promoting piety, personal integrity, and moral restraint. He is never afraid to deliver a frank attack against hypocrisy and vice, even if this raises the ire of his enemies.⁶⁷ Apollonius' counsel reflects the principles of his own life: he worships god according to all the ancient traditions, speaks honestly, and practices a rigorous morality coupled with a disciplined regimen of self-denial.⁶⁸ His mystical communion with the divine, mediated through his *daimonion*, is exhibited not only in his words but also in his actions, which display divine power through healings and exorcisms.⁶⁹ Thus it not only appears that Apollonius has been sent by god, but the philosopher himself takes on godlike qualities.⁷⁰ Apollonius' commitment and courage are demonstrated especially under duress. While in prison, for instance, he calmly encourages his fellow inmates; from the biographer's standpoint, it is noteworthy that in his own time of peril the philosopher tries to comfort others and lead them to the truth.⁷¹

The Portrayal of Paul in Colossians

The evidence proffered by the letter to the Colossians as well as by other sources, as discussed in Chapter One, indicates that the apostle Paul did not evangelize the Lycus River valley in person but relied on trusted associates to carry out this assignment. The letter plainly assumes that Paul is not known directly to any of the readers. The author does not mention any visit of the apostle to the region, nor is there any expectation that a future visit is planned or even possible.⁷² In order to impart a cogent message by means of a pseudepigraphical letter, then, the author of Colossians faced the challenge of constructing for his fictional writer, Paul, a credible persona. While one might argue that the lack of first-hand contact with the apostle may have rendered such a literary undertaking some-

⁶⁶ E.g., Apollonius, *Epistulae* 43, 77, 81, 82, 84; for commentary see Robert J. Penella, *The Letters of Apollonius of Tyana* (Mnemosyne Sup. 56; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979).

⁶⁷ E.g., Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 1.16, 27-28; 4.2, 21-22, 41; 5.22-23, 25-26; 6.19, 40-41.

⁶⁸ Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 1.11, 32-33; 2.38; 3.41; 4.13, 40-41; 5.20; 6.21; 8.19.

⁶⁹ Visions: Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 1.23; 2.37; 4.16; 6.11. Healings and exorcisms: *ibid.*, 3.38-40, 4.10, 20, 45; 6.43.

⁷⁰ Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 1.23 seems to be a sort of divine commission; also cf. 1.5, 19, 3.50, 4.44, 5.24, 8.5.

⁷¹ Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 7.22-28.

⁷² This would distinguish Colossians from all the undisputed letters of the Pauline corpus.

what simpler, our author still had to conform the picture of Paul that emerges through the words of the letter to certain expectations that the readers must have had regarding the content and bearing of his gospel and the manner in which he was known to have presented it. A close reading of this persona suggests that its contours are in certain regards not only consistent with the image of Paul in the early church but also comparable with features of the ideal Greco-Roman philosopher as outlined above. Such a persona would have been both intelligible to the author's Hellenized, gentile audience and faithful to the thought and style of the apostle himself, while nevertheless exhibiting its own distinctive characteristics. These features can be investigated according to a number of categories.

To begin with, the author is able to assume with the addressees a Christian community for whom the person and achievement of Paul were of determinative significance. As discussed in Chapter One, the congregations of the Lycus River valley enjoyed strong ties historically and theologically with the apostle, who supervised the mission to this region during the early 50s AD, which was probably led by Epaphras. From its inception, then, the Pauline gospel would have been not only familiar to the Christian movement in Colossae, but also central to its tradition and identity. Furthermore, and as also discussed in Chapter One, Colossians was probably penned a decade or more subsequent to a lengthy incarceration of the apostle in Rome and his death there. In this case, it would be most likely that the readers had not simply received reports of Paul's suffering and death on behalf of the gospel, but had also witnessed the initial stages of the developing Pauline legend, which would flourish with later generations of Christians.⁷³ This circumstance may be indicated in the letter itself by its presentation not so much of a Paul of careful historical reconstruction as of a Paul "of blessed memory" upon whom has been bestowed an heroic status and who is remembered as a martyr for the church.⁷⁴ As Wayne Meeks puts it, the author of Colossians "has idealized and generalized the apostolic biography" – Paul's status as the *solus apostolus* seems unquestioned.⁷⁵

The author capitalizes on this pre-existing image of the apostle in a variety of ways. Paul is portrayed as a wise teacher, first of all. Paul himself and the appeal he delivers to the readers, his gospel, are

⁷³ On this legend see Harry W. Tajra, *The Martyrdom of St. Paul: Historical and Judicial Context, Traditions, and Legends* (WUNT 2.67; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1994).

⁷⁴ J. Christiaan Beker, *Heirs of Paul: Paul's Legacy in the New Testament and in the Church Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 67-68.

⁷⁵ Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 126.

characterized by wisdom as their interest and goal. The author employs a variety of terms in this regard that would be at home in the vernacular of the moral philosophers:⁷⁶ σοφία (1.9, 28, 2.3, 23, 3.16, 4.5), ἐπίγνωσις (1.9, 10, 2.2, 3.10), γνῶσις (2.3), σύνεσις (1.9, 2.2), φρονεῖν (3.2), διάνοια (1.21).⁷⁷ In 3.2, the author indicates how Christian life in accordance with the Pauline gospel ought to entail a certain intellectual or noetic orientation resulting from baptism. Readers should constantly fix their thoughts on what is above, where Christ is, as opposed to the things below on earth.⁷⁸ "In all wisdom" Paul teaches this gospel of Christ, "in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden" (1.28, 2.3). He entreats God that the Colossian Christians might be "filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual insight" and that they may bear fruit and grow in such knowledge (1.9-10).⁷⁹ The apostle himself struggles so that they will someday achieve full conviction regarding their "insight" for understanding God's mystery (2.2). He exhorts them to teach and admonish each other "in all wisdom" (3.16), and to conduct themselves towards outsiders "in wisdom" (4.5). To be sure, in the moral argument of Colossians, wisdom represents "knowledge" in the sense of a divinely-given and divinely-informed comprehension of reality; but it constitutes moreover a virtue that channels human action. Thus we observe in this argument a practical strategy that grounds knowledge in concrete moral reasoning and conduct, rather than developing it in speculative or impersonal directions.⁸⁰ It is in this spirit that the letter-writer calls upon the recipients to realize their new human existence in Christ, the new creation, which is

⁷⁶ Pokorny (*Colossians*, 107) also observes that this terminology may have been significant for the opposition as well.

⁷⁷ On σοφία: BAGD 759-760; *TDNT* 7.470-476, 498-503; *EDNT* 3.258-261. On ἐπίγνωσις, γνῶσις: BAGD 291; *TDNT* 1.689-692; *NIDNTT* 2.392-394. On σύνεσις: *TDNT* 7.888-890; *NIDNTT* 3.130-134; *EDNT* 3.305. On φρονεῖν: LSJ 1955-1956; BAGD 866; *TDNT* 9.220-224. On διάνοια: LSJ 405; *TDNT* 4.963-967; *EDNT* 1.309-310.

⁷⁸ τὰ ἄνω φρονεῖτε. On the present imperative here see Harris, *Colossians*, 138.

⁷⁹ In addition to the words listed above, the author employs a clutch of terms that relate to the sapiential idiom which all include the ideal of filling or fulfillment, such as πληροῦν (1.9, 25, 2.10, 4.17, cf. 1.24), πλήρωμα (1.19, 2.9), πληροφορία (2.2), and πληροφροεῖν (4.12); cf. below, p. 145.

⁸⁰ Moral philosophers generally underscored the practical orientation of the virtue of wisdom. Cicero (*De Officiis* 1.6.19), e.g., contends that although the search for wisdom and truth possesses certain noble aspects, such pursuits should not detract from the active life or the fulfillment of one's moral duties to others. He complains that, "some people devote too much industry and too deep study to matters that are obscure and difficult and useless as well." Cf. Gred Ibscher, *Der Begriff des Sittlichen in der Pflichtenlehre des Panaitios: Ein Beitrag zur Erkenntnis der mittleren Stoa* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 1934) 106-112.

"being renewed in knowledge" according to the image of God (3.10).⁸¹

The consideration Paul exhibits in the epistle for what is known or learned by the readers also contributes to his persona as a wise teacher. He thanks God for how the Colossians "heard," "understood," and "learned" the grace of God "in truth" (1.6-7, cf. 1.5). He exhorts them to be steadfast in the gospel just as they "were taught" (2.7), and just as they "received" it. The use of the latter term, παραλαμβάνειν, is significant because it points to the transmission and preservation of a distinct body of traditional teaching, summarized in 2.6 by the credal confession "Jesus Christ is Lord."⁸² This tradition seems to form the basis of the Colossians' instruction, which is affirmed and clarified by the apostolic office. Paul also asks the readers to "teach and admonish each other" (3.16) just as he himself admonishes all people and teaches all people (1.28).⁸³ The apostle wants all the Colossians and the Laodiceans to "know" how hard he struggles on their behalf (2.1) and to "know" how he and Timothy are faring (4.7-9). He wants the slaves in his audience to "know" that they will receive a heavenly reward for their obedience, and masters to "know" that they, too, have a Lord, in heaven (3.24, 4.1). In a final piece of summarizing advice, he tells the readers that they ought to "know" how to answer appropriately each person that they encounter (4.6) – a recommendation that apparently applies to non-Christians as well as Christians. Generally speaking, then (and in contrast to the authentic Pauline letters as a whole), the Paul of Colossians is not so much a proclaimer as a teacher, and his audience not so much his hearers as his pupils.⁸⁴

While the wise teaching imparted by the apostle is to a certain degree legitimated by him personally, by his experience and status, there is no question in the epistle as to its ultimate origin and authority, which is divine. On one hand, Paul condemns the human

⁸¹ Cf. συμβιβασθέντες in 2.2; also "seasoned with salt" in 4.6 could be a reference to being wise: O'Brien, *Colossians*, 243.

⁸² On παραλαμβάνειν see LSJ 1315; *TDNT* 4.11-14; *EDNT* 3.29-30; Bruce, *Colossians*, 93-94. For different assessments regarding the substance and function of Christian "tradition" in Colossians see the commentaries (esp. Gnlika, *Kolosserbrief*, 115-116; Wright, *Colossians*, 98-99); also Klaus Wegenast, *Das Verständnis der Tradition bei Paulus und in den Deuteropaulinen* (WMANT 8; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1962) 121-130; for a broader treatment, James I.H. McDonald, *Kerygma and Didache: The Articulation and Structure of the Earliest Christian Message* (SNTSMS 37; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) 101-125. Cf. below, p. 175.

⁸³ On teaching in Colossians see *TDNT* 2.135-148; *EDNT* 1.317-319. On διδάσκω καὶ νοουθετέω used together, perhaps as a traditional pairing, see O'Brien, *Colossians*, 88; Malherbe, *Theorists*, 34-35 (cf. 78-79); Spicq, *Lexicon*, 2.548-551.

⁸⁴ De Boer, "Images of Paul," 378-379.

injunctions of the philosophy as bogus expressions of religious understanding. Based as they are upon the "elements" that comprise the created world, they possess the outward appearance of σοφία but lack the substance (2.4, 8, 22-23), relying vainly on "the mind of flesh," rather than on the body of Christ (2.18). On the other hand, Paul has been sent out as an apostle according to the will of God (1.1), according to the divine stewardship or commission, οἰκονομία,⁸⁵ given to him by God.⁸⁶ Paul received this post in order to fulfill God's plan for the church, the saints (N.B. εἰς ὑμᾶς in 1.25). This effectively defines the basis of Paul's διακονία (cf. 1.23).⁸⁷

An overriding concern for the letter's message, especially insofar as it regards the apostle, is to identify the criterion of truth that animates this stewardship. Apparently, this identification is fashioned, at least in part, with an eye to the epistemological claims made by the opposition. God's plan as it concerns Paul's ministry finds its most specific expression in 1.26-27, which appears to make use of traditional formulations associated with eschatological revelation (cf. 4.3-4).⁸⁸ The author identifies the gospel as a divine mystery, the mystery of Christ, hidden from humanity for ages but now imparted to the saints by God through the Pauline mission. The apostolic ministry manifests the wealth of divine glory among people everywhere who have received Christ, including the readers themselves, who are "the hope of glory" (1.27).⁸⁹ Apparently, the content of this mystery, insofar as it communicates something previously unknown, relates to God's saving purpose in Jesus Christ, particularly that this purpose is directed to the gentiles.⁹⁰ The application of the term δόξα in this

⁸⁵ In addition to the commentaries see Abraham J. Malherbe, "Determinism and Free Will in Paul: The Argument of 1 Corinthians 8 and 9," in Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul*, 249-251.

⁸⁶ In addition to similarities this reveals with language in the moral philosophers about their divine "service" or "office," it is comparable, too, with Epictetus' observation that the sage must be found acceptable "to the divine administration" (τῇ θεῇ διοικήσει) and must conform "to the governance of God" (τῇ τοῦ Διὸς διοικήσει): *Diatribae* 1.12.7-8, 2.23.42, cf. 2.9.19 ff., 3.22.2.

⁸⁷ Cf. Zeilinger, *Erstgeborene*, 45-48.

⁸⁸ Sappington, *Revelation*, 184; cf. Dieter Lührmann, *Das Offenbarungsverständnis bei Paulus und in paulinischen Gemeinden* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1965) 113-140; Nils A. Dahl, *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976) 32.

⁸⁹ Cf. Romans 5.2, 9.23-24, 1 Corinthians 2.6-7.

⁹⁰ Cf. Ephesians 3.6, 8; Wright, *Colossians*, 91-92. This claim by the pseudopigrapher would not only be consistent with the core of the Pauline gospel but perhaps also constitute something of a barb against the Jewish-Christian opposition; cf. Sappington, *Revelation*, 186, who refers also to Seyoon Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (2nd ed.; WUNT 2.4; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1984) 82; differently, Schenk, "Christus," 147-151.

context further suggests that the mystery, which is Christ as he is present in the proclamation and life of the community, partakes of the glorious character of God's very self. The author underscores the divine as well as the palpable and immediate quality of this revelation. The time of salvation long awaited has finally arrived, superseding everything that has gone before and subordinating any distinct revelation that might be achieved apart from Christ and the Pauline gospel.⁹¹

The orientation that Christians are to adopt towards the announcement of this salvation can be summarized in the letter's understanding of the concept of "hope." As critics often note, in the Pauline correspondence ἐλπίς denotes both the act of hoping as well as the objective content of what is hoped for – *spes quae speratur*. This is true of Colossians as well, though in the pseudepigrapher's theological milieu the latter tends to play a more prominent role than it did for the apostle himself.⁹² The hope of the Colossian Christians is already laid up and kept for them above in heaven (1.5) and shapes their lives in the present, so long as they do not shift from that hope (1.23).⁹³ Insofar as δόξα connotes the essential properties of this hope, it describes what is absent in the human condition and what God alone can provide. As the new humanity created in God's grace, believers are in and with Christ, even though Christ is in heaven; this is the sphere of existence in which they appropriate and experience the hope of God's glory. The might of this glory empowers the saints in their Christian struggle, fortifying their faith (1.11).

But while for the letter-writer God has already made known the divine λόγος associated with this mystery among the nations, the glory associated with it is still represented for the community as a reality which is consummated not in the present age of human existence but only in the future.⁹⁴ The term ἐλπίς, then, combines pre-

⁹¹ Cf. Zeilinger, *Erstgeborene*, 102-108.

⁹² Günther Bornkamm, "Die Hoffnung im Kolosserbrief: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Frage der Echtheit des Briefes," *Geschichte und Glaube II: Gesammelte Aufsätze IV* (BEvT 53; München: Kaiser, 1971) 206-213; Gottfried Nebe, "Hoffnung" bei Paulus: *Elpis und ihre Synonyme im Zusammenhang der Eschatologie* (SUNT 16; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983) 169 ff.

⁹³ Cf. Andreas Lindemann, *Die Aufhebung der Zeit: Geschichtsverständnis und Eschatologie im Epheserbrief* (SNT 12; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1975) 40-44.

⁹⁴ On the temporal dimensions of Colossian eschatology see Franz-Josef Steinmetz, *Protologische Heils-Zuversicht: Die Strukturen des soteriologischen und christologischen Denkens im Kolosser- und Epheserbrief* (Frankfurter Theologische Studien 2; Frankfurt: Josef Knecht, 1969) 29-32. Lona, *Eschatologie*, 83 ff. emphasizes the development in Colossians of a more spatial orientation (associated with a more "realized" eschatology) in comparison with Pauline theology; this spatial schema establishes the reality of the resurrected though concealed life in the present, while incorporating a tem-

sent confidence in what God has achieved for the saints with an expectation of the complete revelation of God's saving purpose in the end of time and on a cosmic scale. Hope, then, connects the assurance in faith of what God is doing with what God will do according to the gospel's promise. Thus the recipients anticipate the time of the eschatological epiphany, when, together with Christ, their life will be finally revealed "in glory" (3.4).⁹⁵

So in Colossians, in a fashion that befits its apostolic legacy, Paul is understood to describe and mediate a transcendent reality. The apostle offers his readers a vision that looks beyond the here-and-now to an authenticating mode of human existence that is both above and in the future. Because the eschatological model that forms the basis of this vision takes into account and effectively merges spatial and temporal categories (including terminology that is appropriate to each of these perspectives), that which is hidden in heaven and that which will be revealed in eschatological splendor are essentially equivalent concepts.⁹⁶ From a moral perspective, this means that the Christian life of the readers, their life which "is Christ," is not determined by the priorities of this age and this world, but by what is above, awaiting final revelation with Christ to all the universe.⁹⁷ This perspective helps to substantiate the letter's paraenetic objective. The emphasis on the reality of what is hoped for offers assurance over against opposition and adversity while the view to the future and what is above encourages perseverance and continued growth towards the final goal. Because the readership (presumably) has already given credence to this model, the author is able to express it in abbreviated form. It is nevertheless familiar from and indebted to the author's Pauline heritage, which itself expresses a common Jewish outlook.⁹⁸ As the minister of the gospel specially authorized to reveal God's will and the hope of divine glory that it holds out to humankind, the Paul of Colossians functions in terms of the text's epistemology as a mystagogue, the facilitator of a divine mystery.⁹⁹ Thus the activities of teaching, preaching, and admonishing others that

poral tension in terms of the expectation of the final revelation of that life; the eschatological proviso is constructed as part of the polemic and appeal dictated by the specific circumstances of the epistle.

⁹⁵ On the eschatological overtones of δόξα in this context see O'Brien, *Colossians*, 167-171.

⁹⁶ Barth, *Colossians*, 170-172: the author hardly knows of any distinction between spatial and temporal categories, as befits his eschatological worldview.

⁹⁷ John R. Levison, "2 Apoc. Bar. 48:42 - 52:7 and the Apocalyptic Dimension of Colossians 3:1-6," *JBL* 108 (1989) 93-97.

⁹⁸ Levison, "Apocalyptic Dimension," 93-97; Zeilinger, *Erstgeborene*, 94-115.

⁹⁹ Cf. Lührmann, *Offenbarungsverständnis*, 119 ff.

advance this mystery in the world reveal divine wisdom. It is in the form of the Pauline gospel that hope in what God has done and continues to do for the recipients is appropriated and acknowledged.¹⁰⁰

The argument of the letter consistently amplifies several aspects of this divine wisdom as manifested in the apostolic gospel, especially that this wisdom is completely sufficient for salvation, that it is grounded in moral practice, and that it is directed personally for the readers, as it is for all the saints. Paul does not disclose esoteric, speculative, or technical knowledge, but knowledge that is intended to benefit all people, to inform how people live, and ultimately to "present all people perfect in Christ" (1.28b, cf. 1.22, 3.14). To be sure, the concept of *μυστήριον* (1.26, 27, 2.2, 4.3) would have resonated with Jewish theories concerning divine revelation to the wise,¹⁰¹ which would include also revelatory schemes associated with Jewish apocalyptic thought.¹⁰² And it appears that the apostolic proclamation described in 1.28 intends to save as many individuals as possible from God's wrath at the final judgment (cf. 3.6). Nevertheless, such language would be simultaneously intelligible against the background of the self-presentation offered by some Greco-Roman moralists, who analogically conceived of their special philosophic insights as the revelation of divine "mysteries" which could achieve "perfection" for initiates. Like Paul, they are commissioned to communicate God's will for the sake of educating and saving others. However, the idea of the "perfect" or "mature" person in Colossians does not encompass the goal of ethical perfectionism, as it might, say, for a Stoic thinker, but conforms to the eschatological expectation of a new humanity in Christ that lives in divine knowledge (3.10) and as God's elect (3.12), recovering what God originally intended for human creation.¹⁰³ This expectation helps to shape the distinctively Christian moral and anthropological contours evident in the Colossian mystery (cf. Colossians 3.14, where the Christian moral ideal of *ἀγάπη* is encour-

¹⁰⁰ The theme of hope is also important for philosophic paraenesis, e.g., Epictetus, *Diatribae* 3.26.11; Pseudo-Anacharsis, *Epistulae* 8; Pseudo-Socrates, *Epistulae* 6, 7; Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 24.373-384. Allied with this is the term "confidence" (θάρος), for which see, e.g., Epictetus, *Diatribae* 2.1.39, 2.13.1-4, 3.22.96; Pseudo-Diogenes, *Epistulae* 10, 29; Pseudo-Anacharsis, *Epistulae* 9; Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 7.26.

¹⁰¹ Wilson, *Mysteries*, 156-177.

¹⁰² Raymond E. Brown, *The Semitic Background of the Term "Mystery" in the New Testament* (FBBS 21; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968) 52-56, and passim; Lona, *Eschatologie*, 100-120; Zeilinger, *Erstgeborene*, 94-115.

¹⁰³ Cf. Jacob Jervell, *Imago Dei: Gen 1.26f. im Spätjudentum, in der Gnosis und in den paulinischen Briefen* (FRLANT 58; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960) 231-256.

aged as the “bond of perfection”). In this sense the author of our letter shares in the Christian practice of applying τέλειος in moral contexts, as in, for example, Matthew 5.48, Romans 12.2, and James 1.4, 25, 3.2.¹⁰⁴ In Colossians 1.22, the writer partly defines of what maturity consists in this instance, drawing on language with both legal and sacrificial overtones: Christ died so that the saints might be presented before God as “holy and blameless and irreproachable.”¹⁰⁵ The content and reality of this goal for Christian existence have to be related to the elucidation of the epistle’s concept of hope. Insofar as the readers are in Christ and raised with Christ, they have been rendered perfect, holy, and blameless; yet the final revelation and full appropriation of this reality await the divine verdict of the eschatological judgment.¹⁰⁶ Both aspects of this maturity help situate Christian moral identity and agency in the present.

The revelatory character of the apostolic teaching as the disclosure of God’s mystery carries with it a number of specific features that impact the letter’s moral appeal. First, the emphasis on the ultimate origin of Paul’s ministry is meant to validate his teaching by identifying in what way it conforms with the divine will. Paul speaks with authority to distinguish what constitutes a legitimate expression of that will and what does not, his words laying claim to normative status. His message, consequently, can include praise of the Colossians for their faithful response to God’s grace. At the same time, his preaching includes admonishment (1.28), and the apostle is bold in condemning the deceit of the Colossian philosophy that has infiltrated the community. In the pleas of moral philosophy, such *νουθεσία* or *admonitio* points to common practices of frank criticism and correction, an expression of the philosopher’s *παρησία* intended to alter the bearing of the listeners by exposing moral error and instilling sense.¹⁰⁷ Because admonition is generally unwelcome, the *admonitor* or *monens* often ran the risk of provoking resentment in his audience. The apostolic admonishment of “all people” and of the

¹⁰⁴ Paul J. Du Plessis, *TEΛΕΙΟΣ: The Idea of Perfection in the New Testament* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1959) 198-205 (on Colossians), and passim; *EDNT* 3.342-344 (with bibliography).

¹⁰⁵ On the verb here, *παρίστημι* (“present”) cf. 1.28; further, *TDNT* 5.837-841; *BAGD* 627-628; *EDNT* 3.41.

¹⁰⁶ For 1.22b cf. I Corinthians 1.8, II Corinthians 11.2, Philippians 1.10-11, Jude 24. In the Pauline corpus, *ἐνώπιον* usually means “before” God (rather than “before” Christ, etc.), e.g., Romans 3.20, 14.22, I Corinthians 1.29, II Corinthians 4.2, 7.12, Galatians 1.20. In Revelation it is employed in the sense of being “before” God’s throne (20.12 and often).

¹⁰⁷ *TDNT* 4.1019-1022; Abraham J. Malherbe, “Pastoral Care in the Thessalonian Church,” *NTS* 36 (1990) 382-385; Spicq, *Lexicon*, 2.548-551.

Colossians in particular (2.8-23), demonstrates both his courage on behalf of the gospel and his aim of benefiting others.

Second, divine might infuses both Paul's mission and the apostle himself. The author states this emphatically in 1.29, in terms of the apostolic *ἀγών*: the *ἐνέργεια* for his toil and struggle is impelled constantly by the power of the resurrected Christ, in whom God's own power is reflected (2.12).¹⁰⁸ In his depiction of the apostle, the letter-writer inherits and extends categories that Paul himself had utilized in his self-presentation.¹⁰⁹ This applies in particular to the epistle's interpretation of the apostolic vocation as a sort of divinely-determined endeavor, including the characterization of the force that drives the apostle to confront the contest as being divine in nature.

Third, since it represents God's intention for humanity, the apostolic mission takes on global proportions, in a manner consistent with the cosmic dimensions of Christ's lordship. The universal scope of the apostolic gospel appears, for instance, in the letter's extensive usage of formulations with *πᾶς*, *πᾶσα*, *πάν* – over thirty of them. The gospel bears fruits and grows in “all” the world (1.6), having been preached to “all” creation under heaven (1.23). Paul admonishes “all” people and teaches “all” people so as to present “all” people before God as perfect.¹¹⁰ The benefits of the apostle's efforts, therefore, extend even to churches that he has not visited (like those in the Lycus River valley), indeed, to “all who have not seen my face in the flesh” (2.1). This dimension of the apostle's ministry elucidates its spiritual power: drawing from a conventional epistolary motif,¹¹¹ Paul reminds the readers that his *πνεῦμα* is present among and guiding Christian communities (cf. I Corinthians 5.3-5) even though he is personally absent (2.5).¹¹²

While the letter fails to state so explicitly, it would be fair to infer that it was on account of the apostle's bold teaching and divinely empowered labors as minister of the gospel that he incurred his *παθήματα*. As Eduard Lohse points out, Christians in the last third of the first century AD cherished an image of Paul distinguished by the

¹⁰⁸ On *ἀγών* see Colossians 1.29, 2.1, 4.12; cf. Pfitzner, *Paul*, 109-111.

¹⁰⁹ On the apostolic struggle and the toil it involved cf. I Corinthians 3.8, 4.12, 9.25, 15.10, II Corinthians 6.5, 11.23, 27-28, Galatians 4.11, 19, Philippians 2.16, I Thessalonians 2.9, 3.5, II Thessalonians 3.8. On God's power as present in Paul see I Corinthians 15.10, Philippians 2.13, 3.21, 4.13; cf. *TDNT* 2.652-654.

¹¹⁰ Cf. above, p. 54, n. 14. Paul, like other notable teachers, is known as a world traveler; cf. Anderson, *Sage*, 167-177.

¹¹¹ Gustav Karlsson, “Formelhafte in Paulusbrieffen?” *Erano*s 54 (1956) 138-141, includes examples from ancient epistolary literature.

¹¹² This claim seems to emphasize Paul's special, perhaps unique, authority; cf. *TDNT* 6.436. The connection with the Spirit of God here is not clear.

exhibition of his sufferings. It was precisely in his affliction, and above all in his martyrdom, that Paul performed his ministry on behalf of the entire church, and so "[t]he sufferings of the apostle belong to the unique dignity of his office," and differentiate him from other community members.¹¹³ In this role, the characterization of the apostle would have resembled not only that of the Hebrew prophets (as Lohse notes), but also that of many Hellenistic sages, who brought attention to their adversity as a sign of commitment and fortitude in the cause of their philosophic movement as well as of their place in the divine scheme of educating humanity.

The details of Paul's παθήματα are not indicated in the letter, except that he is imprisoned.¹¹⁴ On account of God's mystery, he "has been bound" (4.3), and he entreats the Colossians in an epistolary *envoi* to remember these "bonds" (4.18). He also describes his colleague Aristarchus in 4.10 as "my fellow-prisoner (of war)." Similarly, Timothy, Epaphras, and Tychicus are designated σύνδουλοι, "fellow-slaves" (1.7, 4.7, 12).¹¹⁵ In an earlier discussion, we noted how incarceration could serve as an effective occasion for a philosophic appeal, especially insofar as it heightens the sense of pathos and earnestness, demonstrating the philosopher's integrity and selfless concern.

While the author of Colossians opts not to detail the content of Paul's sufferings, he does comment in an intriguing manner about what these tribulations accomplish: ἀνταναπληρῶ τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου (1.24). The interpretive quagmire surrounding what has been written in this verse need not detain us long, especially since several complete surveys can be found in the scholarly literature.¹¹⁶ It does appear, however, that any adequate explanation of the claim must take into account the apocalyptic conception in Judaism of the distress (experienced especially in the form of persecution and oppression) to be endured by God's elect as a prelude to the end-time.¹¹⁷ According to some versions,

¹¹³ Lohse, *Colossians*, 72, referring to Ernst Käsemann's review of Jacob Kremer (see n. 116 below) in *TLZ* 82 (1957) 695.

¹¹⁴ On the indifference of Hellenistic sages to imprisonment as a sign of their μεγαλοψυχία, κτλ. see, e.g., Maximus of Tyre, *Orationes* 12.10; Epictetus, *Diatribae* 1.4.24, 1.9.22-29, 2.6.25-27, 2.13.24, 3.24.113, 4.1.59-60, 127, 4.7.31-32; Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 76.33, 85.26; *Socraticorum Epistulae* 14.5.

¹¹⁵ The use of the first-person plural in 1.7 indicates that Timothy is included.

¹¹⁶ Besides the commentaries see Jacob Kremer, *Was an den Leiden Christi noch mangelt: Eine interpretationsgeschichtliche und exegetische Untersuchung zu Kol 1,24b* (BBB 12; Bonn: Hanstein, 1956).

¹¹⁷ Zeilinger, *Erstgeborene*, 82-94; Rainer Stuhlmann, *Das eschatologische Maß im Neuen Testament* (FRLANT 132; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983) 91-108, and *passim*.

such as those in I Enoch 47 or Mark 13, God appointed a definite limit to these tribulations, and thus, as an agent of God's mystery, Paul is in an unparalleled position to "fill up" that which is still "lacking" or "remaining" in them and to contribute to God's plan. Such a role, as it is attributed to Paul, needs to be interpreted also against the background of contemporaneous Jewish and Christian martyrology, according to which a fixed number of saints must suffer and die before the eschaton, when God will avenge their deaths.¹¹⁸ In Colossians, Paul's afflictions are τοῦ Χριστοῦ inasmuch as Christ's death and resurrection inaugurate and determine the eschatological age, and inasmuch as the church on behalf of which Paul suffers is identified as Christ's σῶμα. By absorbing in his self and through his stewardship some of the predetermined measure of afflictions, the "messianic woes," the apostle performs a vicarious ministry, reducing the still deficient tally of sufferings that other Christians, like the readers, must withstand.¹¹⁹ With this we might compare the ideal spiritual guide as depicted in Hellenistic philosophic writings, who will run risks and even sacrifice life itself for the sake of his friends.¹²⁰

It should be emphasized, though, that the efficacy of the Pauline ministry is not located in anguish per se, or in distress endured on behalf of friends, but in suffering for the sake of the gospel. This advances the apostolic goal of leading as many individuals as possible to knowledge of God's mystery (2.2). As Pokorny suggests, "the apostle struggles and suffers in order that people may 'realize' that their salvation in Jesus Christ is already completed." Paul's effort to fill up what remains of the afflictions of Christ "is essentially synonymous with making fully known the word of God" (1.25).¹²¹ In this way the claim of 1.24 accords with the basic thrust of 1.24-2.5.¹²² Furthermore, if the opponents' worldview was indeed apocalyptic in orientation (see above), then Paul's claims about taking

¹¹⁸ This interpretation would be particularly to the point if the Pauline martyr legend was already established in the minds of the letter's original recipients. On the concept of a fixed number of martyrs see IV Ezra 4.35-37, 41-43, V Ezra 2.38-41, II Baruch 23.5, Revelation 6.9-11.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Karl T. Kleinknecht, *Der leidende Gerechtfertigte: Die alttestamentlich-jüdische Tradition vom "leidenden Gerechten" und ihre Rezeption bei Paulus* (WUNT 2.13; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1984) 377-380; Str-B 4.977-986.

¹²⁰ Frischer, *Sculpted Word*, 75-76, 242, with references; cf. Epictetus, *Diatribae* 2.7.3; Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 7.12; Maximus of Tyre, *Orationes* 14.3; Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 6.2-3; Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 1.17-20.

¹²¹ Note the similarity of the verbs involved (ἀνταναπληρῶ and πληρῶσαι): Michael Cahill, "The Neglected Parallelism in Colossians 1,24-25," *ETL* 68 (1992) 142-147.

¹²² Emphasized by Pokorny, *Colossians*, 99-101 (quotes from p. 99); cf. Gnllka, *Kolossierbrief*, 97-98.

upon himself eschatological sufferings could have a special apologetic and polemical point.¹²³

Several items on this front warrant attention for our present concerns. Looking at 1.24 ff. as a whole, the readers are supplied with a glimpse of how Paul's suffering and perseverance for the sake of the gospel manifest God's will and show God's power to be operating through him in a unique capacity. Paul is depicted in the letter not only as accepting his distress but also as rejoicing in it (χαίρω: 1.24, cf. 1.3, 2.5) as a token of God's presence among the elect in the final, decisive age of history (cf. Romans 5.3). The crucial aspect of this presence emerges in that the apostle shares specifically in the afflictions of Christ. As N. T. Wright puts it, "the interchange between Christ and Paul permeates the whole paragraph" of 1.24 ff. (cf. II Corinthians 1.3-7, 4.7-12). Paul "applies to himself the same pattern, of suffering on behalf of others, that was worked out on the cross."¹²⁴ The παθήματα evident in the person of the apostle reflect not only the divine will and divine power, but also make visible a divine model for altruistic service and endurance. This clarifies the conformity of Paul's life to his teaching, indicating also the nature of his commitment to the welfare of the Christian community, which includes the letter's readers. The writer stresses that Paul's sufferings are ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν as well as on behalf of the entire church everywhere, and not for the apostle's own benefit. The author's intention, it seems, is for the audience to perceive in the Paul of the epistle a leader whose ministry is defined above all by suffering and fortitude, someone who participates in the struggles of the Christian journey and can encourage others to endure from a position of authority and experience.¹²⁵ Thus Paul, like the ideal moral philosopher, does not

¹²³ The author in effect takes over traditional apocalyptic categories familiar to and shared with the opponents and then, borrowing from and expanding Pauline concepts, assigns to the apostle an unrivaled place in the fulfillment of the expectations associated with these categories, all the while underscoring his selfless and God-directed service for the church, which would contrast with the picture of false humility and the elitist and judgmental attitude of the philosophy presented in chapter two of the letter; cf. Kremer, *Leiden Christi*, 161-163.

¹²⁴ Wright, *Colossians*, 89. This point makes the most sense rhetorically if the letter's readers were already aware of Paul's martyrdom and were privy to the theological interpretations of this event in the early church. Further, Erhardt Güttgemanns, *Der leidende Apostel und sein Herr: Studien zur paulinischen Christologie* (FRLANT 90; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966) 94-126; Victor P. Furnish, "Paul as MARTYR," *Witness and Existence: Essays in Honor of Schubert M. Ogden* (ed. Philip E. Devenish and George L. Goodwin; Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1989) 73-88.

¹²⁵ Schweizer, *Colossians*, 105: "As the one who proclaims Jesus Christ, he does, as it were, represent his Lord, and therefore shares in his weakness, in which alone God's glory takes effect on earth. At the same time, it is only the suffering which the

shy away from conflict, but toils mightily in the *ἀγών* of life on behalf of his followers, even for the benefit of followers who have never met him. In this context we should remember that the ability to edify others *in absentia* was a praiseworthy element in the Greco-Roman paragon of the teacher-mentor.¹²⁶ For his own part, Paul is engaged in an ongoing struggle against opposition to God's will in all its forms, such as the Colossian philosophy and the forces associated with it that obstruct full knowledge of the gospel. By summoning the recipients of the letter to unite with him in confronting such forces, Paul identifies a critical interest that he wants to share with them – their enemies are his enemies and vice versa.

The affinity between Paul's life and what he teaches evidences the extent to which he not only communicates but also embodies the mystery of God. The substance and standard of the gospel as set forth in Colossians are guaranteed by appeal not to human reason and experience, nor to a common apostolic tradition, nor to scripture, nor to the words of Jesus, but to Paul alone.¹²⁷ To the degree that Paul and his gospel are identical, the example of apostolic vocation as proffered by the epistle becomes an archetype for those who desire to conform themselves to that gospel. This suggests the appropriateness of investigating how the persona of Paul and the manner of his address to the readers provide a personal example that buttresses, clarifies, and validates its exhortation. Because no direct appeal to imitation surfaces in the epistle such as we find in, say, I Corinthians, the function of Paul as exemplar is executed only indirectly; this sort of tactic would be comparable to that of the moral philosophers.¹²⁸ As noted above, the Paul of Colossians manifests himself above all as a wise teacher and faithful minister. He teaches and admonishes all people in all wisdom (1.28); the gospel set forth by his ministry embraces God's truth (1.5-6). Paul prays and gives thanks to God for the success of this ministry (1.3, 9); he sings, in the words of a traditional hymn, the praises of what God has rendered through Christ (1.15-20); all in all, the apostle fulfills the *λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ* (1.25, cf. 4.3).

Paul entreats the readers, for their part, to do these and similar things themselves; he entreats them, in effect, to follow his lead.

apostle takes upon himself that really allows his message to become credible. In Col. 1.24, these two motifs are connected together: the apostle represents Christ in the world, and he brings Christ's work to fulfillment by his authentic proclamation of him as the redeemer of the community."

¹²⁶ See above, pp. 57-58, 61, 63; also Frischer, *Sculpted Word*, 118 ff.

¹²⁷ De Boer, "Images of Paul," 364.

¹²⁸ See Fiore, *Personal Example*, 164 ff., 191 ff.

Thus they should be filled with the knowledge of God (1.9-10, 3.10); they should teach and admonish each other in all wisdom (3.16) and know how to answer everyone (4.6); they ought to pray (4.3) and give thanks to God (1.12, 2.7, 3.15, 17, 4.2); they must not lie or slander, but tell the truth (3.8-9); they should sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual odes to God, doing everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. Simply put, they should allow the λόγος τοῦ Χριστοῦ to dwell in them richly (3.16, cf. 1.5, 3.17, 4.6). The example of the apostle also functions to illustrate fortitude in the midst of the troubles and the ἀγών demanded by full commitment to the gospel, especially in 1.24 ff. (cf. 4.3-4). Paul's efforts are impelled by divine energy, which is at work in him "in power," ἐν δυνάμει (1.29). Paul strives in particular so that others may not be misled by deceivers (2.4-5). Likewise, the apostle prays that in their Christian life the Colossians will be "empowered with every power" (ἐν πάσῃ δυνάμει δυνάμουμενοι) by divine might, with a view to their resolute endurance and patient fortitude, upon which they must draw in overcoming trials and opposition (1.11, cf. 3.12); and he warns them at length about the dangers of false teaching (2.8-23).¹²⁹ Paul's tribulations also prove his love for others (2.2), his humility (1.24, 29), and his Christ-like character (1.24); Paul's message conveys a strong sense of hope in what God is doing in Christ. In a like manner, he wants the Colossians to make love their bond of perfection (3.14), particularly in marital relations (3.19), to exercise true (3.12-13) not false (2.16-18) humility, to take on Christ-like virtues (3.12-17), and to remain steadfast in their hope (1.23).¹³⁰ As "a slave in (the) Lord" (δοῦλος ἐν κυρίῳ: 4.7, cf. 1.7) and one of the "workers for the kingdom of God" (συνεργοὶ εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ: 4.11, cf. 1.13), Paul seems to be in an appropriate position to command the slaves (οἱ δοῦλοι) among his readers to work (ἐργάζεσθε) from the soul as if to the Lord (3.23) and to serve (δουλεύετε) the Lord (3.24). He calls upon the entire congregation to pursue good works (ἔργα: 1.10) and not bad (1.21), making certain that all works are done in the Lord's name (3.17). Just as Paul has received and faithfully executes his ministry (διάκονος: 1.23, 25; cf. 1.7 and 4.7, where Epaphras and Tychicus are identified as διάκονοι), he asks Archippus, probably the leader of a Laodicean congregation, to fulfill the διακονία that he received in the Lord (4.17).¹³¹ Indeed, Paul's ministry as a whole as displayed in the epistle offers the church a pattern for what its ministry should be.

¹²⁹ On δύναμις: *TDNT* 2.284-317. On ὑπομονή: Wilson, *Love*, 164, n. 47. On μακροθυμία: *TDNT* 4.374-387; *MDNTT* 2.768-772.

¹³⁰ Cf. Schenk, "Christus," 151-152.

¹³¹ Cf. Zeilinger, "Träger," 185-188.

As mentioned earlier, in moral philosophy the efficacy of a paraenetic message depended upon the establishing of personal ties and mutual interests between the student and the teacher. Because such concerns were thought to be basic to the pedagogical process, moral guides regularly availed themselves of the language and ideals of the friendship *topos* in their communications, and the interests of friendship in the learning relationship often furnished a context for epistolary exhortation. There is no question that in comparison with some of Paul's undisputed letters, the friendly, or philophroneitic, aspects of Colossians are subdued. Nevertheless some features may still be detected. To begin with, Paul indicates a degree of personal association with the readers through familial and fraternal language. He reminds the readers that they all have a common parent, "God our father" (1.1, 3, cf. 1.12, 3.17), who created them (1.16, 3.10), and who has qualified them to receive a divine inheritance (1.12, cf. 3.24).¹³² Paul and the Colossians have also the same Lord, Jesus Christ in heaven, to whom they all owe obedience.¹³³ The employment of this metaphor suggests also that they all belong to the same divine household – and in 3.18-4.1 the recipients are actually addressed in their specific social roles as members of a household, indicating the sorts of responsibilities that follow from this lordship. Paul refers to the Laodiceans as brothers (4.15) and to the Colossians as faithful brothers in Christ (1.2), much in the same way as the apostle's close associates Timothy, Tychicus, and Onesimus are his brothers (1.1, 4.7, 9). Furthermore, Paul, the Colossians, and all Christians are linked together and united with Christ as a living organism, as they grow, nourished by God (2.19). All Christians belong to the same church, the body, which is joined to Christ as its head, a concrete social reality that Christians together recognize and confess (1.18-20, 3.15-17). Also in the spirit of friendship are Paul's indications of his pleasure at receiving good reports about the Colossians via Epaphras, and his prayerful response (1.3-4, 7-8), as well as his eagerness to share news pertaining to his own circumstances with them in turn (4.7-9).

Equally significant is the considerable amount of "name dropping" that occurs in the letter.¹³⁴ The author refers to the names of

¹³² Cf. Pokorny, *Colossians*, 37-39.

¹³³ Jesus Christ is regularly referred to in the letter as κύριος: 1.3, 10, 2.6, 3.13, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24, 4.1, cf. 3.1; for the Pauline corpus, Fritz Neugebauer, *In Christus EN XPIETΩI: Eine Untersuchung zum Paulinischen Glaubensverständnis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961) 131-149.

¹³⁴ Similar devices are not unheard of in philosophic letters, including pseudonymous ones, e.g., Cicero, *Epistulae ad Quintum Fratrem* 1.1.10-11; *Socraticorum Epistulae* 14.9.

an unexpectedly large number of people, who presumably represent the mutual acquaintances of Paul and the addressees. Many of these individuals are listed in either the opening or the closing of the epistle as simply sending greetings (1.1, 4.10-14) or as receiving greetings or instructions (4.15-17). Evidently, the author of Colossians lifted most of these names from the authentic letter of Paul to Philemon; it is interesting that the latter's name, though, is not mentioned.¹³⁵ As such, these figures reflect the apostolic heritage of the region, supporting indirectly the concern and authority of the letter and grounding this communication in the experience of the apostle.¹³⁶ Perhaps more important to Paul's relationship with the Colossians are those fellow ministers and colleagues who actively assist them in maintaining contact. These associates are of considerable value, it seems, in making the separated parties present to one another by perpetuating the apostolic legacy. Epaphras, "our beloved fellow servant," "a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf" (1.7), and "a slave of Christ" who is a native of Colossae (4.12), occupies a central place in this regard.¹³⁷ As discussed in Chapter One, Epaphras most likely founded the churches of the region under Paul's supervision, and he had reported to Paul concerning their positive response to the gospel (1.8). In the letter Paul is made to testify in a rather formal manner that Epaphras has labored intently on behalf of all the Christians in the Lycus River region,¹³⁸ specifically as he struggles for them in his prayers to God, so that they might stand perfect and be filled with all of God's will (4.12-13). Epaphras' status and efforts overlap to a noticeable degree with those of the apostle. It looks as though he constitutes an authentic extension of the Pauline ministry in Colossae and so links the unseen apostle with the community, even though he, like Paul, is absent to the readers and his return to Colossae is not anticipated. In this sense, then, the readers are to learn from the example of Epaphras much in the same way they learn from the model of Paul himself.

Tychicus and Onesimus also help make the apostolic presence real for the Colossians.¹³⁹ The former is acknowledged as "a beloved

¹³⁵ Lohse, *Colossians*, 175-177; Alastair Kirkland, "The Beginnings of Christianity in the Lycus Valley: An Exercise in Historical Reconstruction," *Neotestamentica* 29 (1995) 111-113.

¹³⁶ Pokorny, *Colossians*, 189.

¹³⁷ Ollrog, *Mitarbeiter*, 101.

¹³⁸ Perhaps this mode of testimony would have been (incidentally?) appropriate also to Paul's ostensible status as a prisoner; as Pokorny (*Colossians*, 193) observes, this is "a virtually juridical verification." Cf. Ollrog, *Mitarbeiter*, 238-240.

¹³⁹ Cf. Peter Lampe, "Onesimus," *ABD* 5 (1992) 21-22; John Gillman, "Tychicus," *ABD* 6 (1992) 682.

and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord" (4.7); the latter is identified as a native of Colossae who is a "faithful and beloved brother" (4.9). They appear to be the co-bearers, and hence authenticators, of the letter (cf. *ἔπεμψα* in 4.8). Moreover, Paul has sent them to inform the recipients about "all my affairs" (*τὰ κατ' ἐμὲ πάντα*: 4.7) and "the matters concerning us" (*τὰ περὶ ἡμῶν*: 4.8; where "us" means Paul and Timothy) and "everything going on here" (*πάντα ... τὰ ὧδε*: 4.9). In this manner Paul is seen as responding to and reciprocating the relay of information from the Colossian community via Epaphras. This disclosure of news about the apostle and his colleagues is intended to encourage their hearts (4.8, cf. 2.2). It seems that Tychicus and Onesimus perpetuate the apostolic heritage for the readers in the most tangible sense, while the apostle, in turn, is seen as legitimating their ministry through the words of the letter.¹⁴⁰

Taken as a whole, the passages surveyed above sketch a picture of formal and ongoing interaction, including the exchange of personal information, within the scope of a fairly large and established community. Such an image and the manner in which it is constructed would be consistent with the philophronetic objectives of hortatory letters in the traditions of Greco-Roman philosophy. Working under the authority of Paul, Epaphras evangelizes the area, then reports back to Paul and Timothy, who, for their part, respond with prayers and communicate with the Christians of the region by means of messages and messengers. The written communications would have included at least the *ἐντολαί* dispatched to the Colossians regarding Mark the cousin of Barnabas (4.10)¹⁴¹ as well as "the letter from Laodicea" (*ἡ ἐπιστολή ... ἐκ Λαοδικείας*: 4.16), which they are instructed to read.¹⁴² While it is unlikely that either of these documents had been actually written at that time, the mention of them, even if a fabrication, contributes to the perception of Paul as actively interested in the success of the Christian mission to Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis.¹⁴³ According to the fiction of the letter, even in his last days and while in prison, suffering on behalf of the church, the

¹⁴⁰ Gnlika, "Paulusbild," 183 ff.; Lähnemann, *Kolossierbrief*, 177-182; Zeilinger, "Träger," 177-183, 186-187; Michael Wolter, *Der Brief an die Kolosser; Der Brief an Philemon* (Ökumenischer Taschenbuchkommentar zum Neuen Testament 12; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1993) 214-215.

¹⁴¹ Gnlika, *Kolossierbrief*, 238.

¹⁴² O'Brien (*Colossians*, 257-259) surveys the options regarding this letter.

¹⁴³ It was not uncommon for pseudonymous epistles in the philosophic tradition to refer to previous, fictional correspondence, e.g., Pseudo-Diogenes, *Epistulae* 17, 25, 45; Pseudo-Socrates, *Epistulae* 1; *Socraticorum Epistulae* 16, 25, 27; Apollonius, *Epistulae* 49.

apostle was intent to keep these people informed about his condition and his thoughts. The readers, then, are not isolated from the body, the church, nor cut off from the information and support they need. The epistle underscores that Paul and the other leaders of the Pauline movement are concerned about their success and are monitoring their progress at this critical juncture in their history as a Christian community. This fact carries with it added responsibility and social pressure to respond and conform to the Pauline gospel as authentically imparted by the epistle.¹⁴⁴ The precise nature of this response as it relates to the gospel will occupy our attention in the next chapter.

¹⁴⁴ Meeks, "To Walk Worthily," 40-42, 45.

CHAPTER THREE

A HIDDEN LIFE

Having observed some of the ways in which the epistle to the Colossians delineates the persona of its author, a logical next step is to extend the analysis to a study of the letter's recipients as they are portrayed by the internal discourse of the text. The business of this study continues as before, namely, to investigate the ideational profile and exhortatory objectives of the letter by comparing it with the strategies at work in the literature of Greco-Roman moral philosophy, paraenesis in particular. Our guiding question, then, is this: how does the manner in which the recipients are described and addressed in Colossians compare with such strategies and how does the character of the text that emerges from this comparison contribute to the pedagogical objectives of the author? We can begin with some introductory (and fairly limited) observations regarding the basic nature of the assumed readership.

If even an answer about the exact place of residence for the "Colossians" cannot be determined with assurance (see Chapter One), even less concrete evidence can be gleaned from the letter regarding their background and makeup. The instructions imbedded in the household code of 3.18-4.1, for example, may supply us with a hint as to the diversity of social roles manifested by the readership: husbands and wives, parents and children, slaves and slave-owners are all included.¹ The roster in 3.11 may supply another clue, this time concerning the Colossians' ethnic diversity, listing Greeks, Jews, "barbarians," and Skythians (cf. 1.27, 2.11, 13).² Yet in the case of both 3.18 ff. and 3.11 we appear to be dealing with conventionalized, traditional formulations that were not necessarily designed to address any particular situation among the recipients.³ Additionally,

¹ It is interesting in this context that the slaves in the audience receive the most extended recommendations; cf. Meeks, "To Walk Worthily," 51; above, p. 46, n. 137.

² Cf. Douglas A. Campbell, "Unravelling Colossians 3.11b," *NTS* 42 (1996) 120-132.

³ On 3.18 ff. see above, pp. 45-47. As for 3.11, Wedderburn (*Theology*, 10, 13) notes that the addition of the last two items to the list lends to the formulation a decidedly more Greek perspective (cf. I Corinthians 12.13, Galatians 3.28), and that the statement as a whole would have added point if the Colossian churches were exposed to "Judaizing" pressures such as we might expect from a Jewish-Christian missionary movement akin to the Elchasaïtes; see above, pp. 35-37.

the level of sophistication discernible in the language and style of the letter itself informs us generally about the readers' literacy and theological acumen, but offers no specifics as to their background or training.

A few preliminary remarks are in order about what can be ascertained regarding the ecclesial setting and situation of the addressees. The letter's audience purports to consist of the Christians residing in Colossae, as stated in 1.2. However, as argued above, there are reasons to challenge the complete accuracy of this statement. The epistle's references to Laodicea and Hierapolis suggest that the Christians in these urban centers were probably included among the intended recipients and may even have represented the primary addressees. We can note, incidentally, that these references to sister cities in the Lycus River valley also seem to indicate that the community reading the letter did not belong to some isolated enclave of the Christian movement, but at some point (perhaps from very early on) had developed associations of one kind or another with like-minded groups in nearby urban centers. The orders conveyed in 4.15-16, for instance, really make sense only if both the author and the readers can assume as natural some sort of relationship between the Christians in Colossae and those in Laodicea.⁴

The Experience of Conversion

One specific datum pertaining to the letter's recipients is, however, quite plain and can furnish a starting point for further comparative study: they are all converts to Christianity. The author signals the reality of their Christian status repeatedly in the text. The Colossians are "saints and faithful brethren in Christ" (1.2, cf. 1.12, 26); they are members of the church (1.24, cf. 4.15) in the one body, of which Christ is the head (1.18, 2.19); they are God's elect (3.12). Having heard the message of the gospel (1.5, 23), they have "received" Jesus Christ as Lord (2.6) and have faith in him (1.4, 2.5, 7, cf. 1.23, 2.12). All in all, membership in the Christian community represents the primary context in which the writer designates the standing and orientation of those addressed. According to the sequence of events proposed in Chapter One, the initial evangelization of the Lycus River valley would have occurred in the early 50s AD, while the epistle to the Colossians itself was composed sometime in the 70s or 80s. Thus the people reading the letter must have been organized for

⁴ Of course, from the perspective of the readers that relationship may belong to the past rather than the present.

some twenty or thirty years as a Christian community. This indicates that, while no doubt at least a few individuals in the intended audience were recent converts, the readership as a whole could point to a fairly long history as Christians with well-established practices and traditions. At any rate, their Christian heritage would have been perceptibly longer than that of the intended readers of most all of the undisputed Pauline correspondence.

Given that the Colossian audience was composed of Christians, most of whom had been converts for some time, the question arises as to what exactly conversion entailed for them in this historical context, how it was interpreted theologically, and what long-term impact it could possess for the issuing of moral guidance. This is especially an issue of concern for the interpretation of Colossians inasmuch as modern scholars have detected in its language and imagery a fair number of possible references to the process of conversion.

As for the broader historical milieu of the letter, the terms employed during this period to name conversion – ἐπιστροφή, μεταστροφή, ὑποστροφή, etc. – are metaphorically suggestive of the prevailing understanding of such an event as a personal “turning.” To the ancient mind conversion entailed a comprehensive intellectual and spiritual reorientation. This reorientation initiates in some sense a new life progressing towards an established, personal goal, such as wisdom, virtue, or *eudaimonia*.⁵ As a life-altering experience, conversion also generates new personal possibilities, more often than not overturning or substantially revising previous sensibilities about moral accountability and the nature and value of human associations.⁶ To be sure, a high level of social interaction and “communal therapy” of the sort we encounter in Jewish and Christian circles was not the norm for the psychagogy of the philosophic movements, which tended to be highly individualized in approach, though Epicureanism for certain, and perhaps also Neopythagoreanism, of-

⁵ For discussion see Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1990).

⁶ For some representative discussions see Norman W. DeWitt, *Epicurus and his Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1954) 89-105; Hijmans, “Ἀσκησις,” 41-53; John P. Lynch, *Aristotle's School: A Study of a Greek Educational Institution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972) 83-96; Dillon and Hershbell, *Iamblichus*, 14-16; Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *The Stoic Theory of Oikeiosis: Moral Development and Social Interaction in Early Stoic Philosophy* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1990) 116-140; Loveday Alexander, “Schools, Hellenistic,” *ABD* 5 (1992) 1005-1111; Johan C. Thom, *The Pythagorean Golden Verses: With Introduction and Commentary* (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 123; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995) 82-89; Glad, *Paul*, 101 ff.

ferred its converts life in a special community of believers, a system of support distinct from the outside world.⁷ And for initiates to the other philosophic schools, conversion entailed the adoption of at least some new social arrangements and priorities, as well as the inculcation of a new orientation towards understanding and interacting with existing social structures and mores. As Meeks observes, the impact of such change for the neophyte's interpersonal priorities must have been profound:

Conversion implies a change of reference groups and reference individuals – those...to whom we look...for standards, for approval or disapproval, for measures of how well we are doing.⁸

Surprisingly perhaps, in antiquity the enterprise of describing and facilitating a personal transformation of this sort did not belong especially to the domain of what we would call "religion," where a more casual, less drastic degree of allegiance was the norm, but was the concern of the philosophic schools, a fact that reveals some important features regarding their function in Greco-Roman society.⁹ Insofar as both Judaism and Christianity expected of their followers a wholesale relocation and an abiding commitment of the type summarized above, their evaluation of the human condition would have approximated that of the schools more than that of most pagan cults.¹⁰ An examination of the literature of the earliest Christians, as represented by the correspondence of the apostle Paul and his associates, indicates the importance to them of talking about conversion, especially with regard to the impact of conversion on the process of moral formation.¹¹ In many respects, the presuppositions and fundamental shape of this conversation resembled discussions among Greco-Roman philosophers and their converts regarding their expe-

⁷ Malherbe, *Paul*, 34 ff.

⁸ Wayne A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1993) 48.

⁹ A.D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933) 164-186; Pierre Hadot, *Exercices Spirituels et Philosophie Antique* (2nd ed.; Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1987) 16, 40, 51, 175-182; Frischer, *Sculpted Word*, 46-86, and passim; Meeks, *Origins*, 18-36.

¹⁰ On conversion in Judaism see Shaye J.D. Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew," *HTR* 82 (1989) 13-33; Martin Goodman, "Jewish Proselytizing in the First Century," *The Jews among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire* (ed. Judith Lieu, John North, and Tessa Rajak; London, New York: Routledge, 1992) 53-78.

¹¹ Elpidius Pax, "Beobachtungen zur Konvertitensprache im ersten Thessalonicherbrief," *Studii Biblici Franciscani Analecta* 21 (1971) 220-261; idem, "Konvertitenprobleme im ersten Thessalonicherbrief," *Bibel und Leben* 13 (1972) 24-37; Malherbe, *Paul*, 21-33; Meeks, *Origins*, 31-36.

riences of having "turned around." In order to shed some light on what a Christian text like Colossians shares with the philosophic traditions of moral pedagogy concerning the implications of conversion for adherents, we need first to examine the basic profile of those traditions.

A reasonable starting-point for understanding what the philosophic form of life entailed for Hellenistic people lies with those categories of literature that attempted to induce others to convert, to embrace such a life. We label such appeals for personal transformation in a philosophic medium as protreptic, a classification that encompasses both a literary genre and the broader rhetorical objectives that the genre manifests.¹² Again, the image of turning from one comprehensive path or orientation to another, better one is visible. For the most part, the protreptic mode of discourse consists of an exhortatory speech that commends a particular philosophic vocation through sustained demonstration and systematic argumentation.¹³ The speaker endeavors to prove the superiority of the philosophic system in question over competing systems and to persuade potential converts to pursue what the speaker recommends and to reject what the speaker condemns, recognizing the deficiencies of their current state. As Mark Jordan mentions, while this identifies the principal interest of protreptic address, it is also possible to detect in such speeches how the author will take into consideration a "dual" audience. Protreptic appeals might function not only to induce conversion in non-initiated individuals but also to reinforce commitment to the conversion experience among neophytes who have recently joined the philosophic movement.¹⁴

Another category of literature related materially to the conversion experience is the conversion story. This genre achieved a certain popularity in the philosophic schools and developed a rather conventional set of formal structures and literary expectations.¹⁵ Most such accounts, even when autobiographical in nature, were published less out of interest in historical veracity than as retrospective creations infused with a high degree of idealism and rhetorical enhancement, no doubt intended to make the stories more effective for

¹² For literature see Wilson, *Mysteries*, 194, n. 36.

¹³ John G. Gammie, "Paraenetic Literature: Toward the Morphology of a Secondary Genre," *Semeia* 50 (1990) 52-55.

¹⁴ Mark D. Jordan, "Ancient Philosophic Protreptic and the Problem of Persuasive Genres," *Rhetorica* 4 (1986) 309-333.

¹⁵ Niels Hyldahl, *Philosophie und Christentum: Eine Interpretation der Einleitung zum Dialog Justins* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1966) 148-159; Paula Fredriksen, "Paul and Augustine: Conversion Narratives, Orthodox Traditions, and the Retrospective Self," *JTS* 37 (1986) 3-34.

purposes of apologetic or propaganda. Specimens of this genre, such as are available to us from Lucian's *Nigrinus*, Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*, or the New Testament's Acts of the Apostles, functioned to vindicate and assert a particular manner of life over against its detractors, and to recommend to others the decision to pursue such a life by providing a vivid illustration of the positive changes engendered by conversion.

As a group, philosophers recognized that the path they urged upon converts, either through protreptic appeals, conversion stories, or other contrivances, was demanding. Arduous toil and hardship were necessary if favorable results were to be realized. Conversion did not bring about immediate and total happiness, even if the romanticized versions of such experiences portrayed converts as instantly elevated to an existence of perfect virtue.¹⁶ While conversion surely did constitute a reorientation of values, priorities, and efforts, it was in truth only the beginning of a lengthy journey in which evidence of continuous progress was required.¹⁷ But this progress had to be maintained in the presence of considerable obstacles. Philosophic neophytes needed to overcome the onerous task of learning the school's doctrines and traditions, for instance; they needed to adopt the proper disposition for instruction and the correct attitude for accepting correction from their superiors; they needed to avoid contentiousness and the conceit of wisdom in their words and deeds; they needed to avoid also the distractions of their previous life and the temptations of the dominant culture. All the while it was incumbent upon students to suppress the fear and self-doubt, the mental and emotional distress, that were part and parcel of the philosophic quest. Philosophic aspirants had to abandon previous habits, social status, and personal relationships and ambitions, only to endure the low esteem and scorn of the general public because they did not conform to prevailing standards of belief and behavior.¹⁸ Exacerbating these routine demands, sometimes special crises arose, such as the separation of pupil and teacher, or the teacher's death, or a destabilizing conflict with rival movements. It comes as no surprise, then, that neophytes generally experienced feelings of *ἐρημία* ("loneliness") and *ἀπορία* ("perplexity"). In response, philosophy promised to give peace to such trouble by providing a life of inner tranquillity, confidence, and freedom.¹⁹

¹⁶ Meeks, *Origins*, 22.

¹⁷ On the converted life as a type of journey cf. Philo, *De Virtutibus* 102-103.

¹⁸ E.g., Plutarch, *De Profectibus in Virtute* 77E-78B; Epictetus, *Diatribae* 3.15.10-12, *Encheiridion* 22, 29; Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus* 1.52.

¹⁹ Epictetus, *Diatribae* 3.13.1-19. On the difficulties of the philosophic life see

Not all novices, of course, responded similarly to the challenge. As part of their overall plan of assistance, some philosophers sought to categorize the typical conditions of students in order to render the support offered to them as apt as possible. These categories corresponded to different stages or aspects of progress, προκοπή, within the school. In *Epistulae Morales* 52, for instance, Seneca, following Epicurus, enumerates three classes of adherents, differentiated by their temperaments (*ingenia*) and, corresponding to these, by the amount and nature of the external assistance they require to achieve success.²⁰ To the first category Seneca assigns those individuals who have plotted a route to virtue on their own, relying entirely on their inner drive and knowledge; this appears to be a rather elite group (§ 3a, cf. §§ 1-2). To the second, more populous grade of students belong those who must rely on a guide to lead the way. Individuals like this, though they possess the will to prevail, nevertheless have need of the instruction and example provided by another, someone able to provide suitable assistance (§ 3b). With the third category the teacher encounters "more difficult material upon which to work" (§ 4). These people require much more than a moral and spiritual guide; they must be actually assisted, even prodded and compelled along the path to virtue. They must, in effect, wrestle their way to wisdom (§ 6). Seneca observes that for those students belonging to the second category personal gains in the philosophic system are obvious and easy. By contrast, the progress of those in the third category "is hidden" (*latet*: § 5), so to speak, because it relies on so much extra effort along the way. The foundation upon which their progress rests is just as secure as that of the second-class students, says Seneca, but its value and character are apparent to the onlooker only upon close inspection.²¹

To aspirants of this ilk, philosophic educators were in agreement that constant reminders, encouragement, and correction were necessary. In the evaluation of the philosopher-teacher, the most pressing problem evident in these students, as they wrestled their way to wisdom, was not so much that they did not comprehend the principles

Hijmans, "Ἀσκησις," 48-51; Malherbe, *Paul*, 36-46; idem, "Hellenistic Moralists," 301-304; Stanley K. Stowers, "Paul on the Use and Abuse of Reason," *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (ed. David L. Balch, Everett Ferguson, Wayne A. Meeks; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 258-260; Frischer, *Sculpted Word*, 52-66; Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 90-100, and *passim*.

²⁰ Cf. Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 71.29-37, 75.8-15; Hadot, *Seneca*, 155-158; Malherbe, "Pastoral Care," 378; Newman, "Cotidie Meditare," 1484-1485; Stowers, "Reason," 279-281.

²¹ Cf. *Epistulae Morales* 79.17, where Seneca discusses "hidden virtue" which will one day be revealed.

advocated by their movement, but that they failed to put these principles into practice on a consistent basis.²² Progress for these individuals does not reside in book-learning, but in recognizing and acting upon one's moral commitments in all spheres of human activity.²³ Accordingly, paraenetic educators often tried to focus the attention of their readers on making tangible progress in "exemplaric situations" of philosophic training, such as cultivating particular virtues, respecting one's inter-personal obligations, or controlling harmful emotions.²⁴ What the philosophers saw as needful, to paraphrase Epictetus, were pupils who would demonstrate what they had learned by reforming their character, by becoming a living example to others.²⁵ As Seneca complains to Lucilius, "[y]ou are better at approving the right course than at following it out."²⁶ This basic pedagogical dilemma, as seen through the eyes of the instructor, could be accountable to any number of personal deficiencies in the neophyte. Some students, for instance, are indecisive and plagued by self-doubt – they are unsure of what they really want. Others are able to visualize the goal clearly but lack the courage, focus, and persistence to attain it. Still others are hindered by certain character flaws such as the conceit of wisdom or the inability to accept correction, but on account of inexperience and self-deception are unable to discern them.²⁷

These observations illustrate the underlying difficulty that neophytes encountered as they attempted to shed the false views, ideas, and practices associated with their pre-philosophic manner of life. For these reasons and others, students must rely on their teacher to serve as their *custos*, protector and guardian, and as their *monens*, advisor and counselor, someone trustworthy and with an upright mind who, in the midst of vanity, falsehood, and confusion, can supply the

²² Cf. Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 75.7, regarding the things that the philosopher must learn: *Non est beatus, qui scit illa, sed qui facit*. Further, Hadot, *Seneca*, 103-126; Hadot, *Exercices Spirituels*, 15-29, 217-227.

²³ Epictetus, *Diatribae* 1.4.5-12.

²⁴ Sec, e.g., Hans Dieter Betz, "De Cohibenda Ira (Moralia 452E-464D)," in idem, *Plutarch's Ethical Writings*, 170-197; among such situations Plutarch includes the treatment of slaves and restraining one's anger, topics which occur also in Colossians 3.8, 19. 4.1; cf. Ingenkamp, *Plutarch's Schriften*, 14-26.

²⁵ Epictetus, *Diatribae* 1.29.55-57; cf. Maximus of Tyre, *Orationes* 25.2, 5-6; Philo, *De Mutatione Nominum* 270, *De Virtutibus* 184.

²⁶ Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 21.1.

²⁷ Cf. Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 94.32: "we are hindered from accomplishing praiseworthy deeds not only by our emotions, but also by want of practice in discovering the demands of a particular situation." Cf. 75.4, 7, 89.14-15, 94.31; Epictetus, *Diatribae* 1.26.3, 1.29.56, 2.9.13. Dio Chrysostom (*Orationes* 20.13-14) emphasizes the many distractions that can divert one from a whole-hearted pursuit of reason.

sort of unflagging assistance that is indispensable for making progress.²⁸ In the course of one's philosophic career, a myriad of specific, and often unexpected obstacles must be overcome as the full meaning of the school's principles is mastered.²⁹ Only by receiving support from the *custos-monens* can the novice approve of the right course, remain true to his or her convictions, and not be led astray by the multitude of erroneous options.³⁰ As we learned in Chapter Two, there evolved in philosophic circles a whole set of expectations as to the character and vocation of such a guardian. The focus of the comments here is on what effect the guidance offered by the teacher was generally intended to have on the recipients. As Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* 94 makes plain, the core of such guidance consisted of (*ad*)*monitio*, *praeceptio*, *adhortatio*, and so on – in other words, *paraenesis*.³¹ The primary objective of this instruction surfaces not in the effort to impart anything new or to chart a fresh course to which neophytes should aspire, but rather to rouse their memory as to what they already know they should do, engage the attention regarding the impending business, help locate priorities when the demands of the situation seem confusing, and generally encourage students to conform their actions to their philosophic convictions.³² As Seneca puts it, "whatever is salutary should be often discussed and often brought to mind, so that it may be not only familiar to us, but also ready to hand" (94.26).³³ Musonius Rufus' counsel for the philosophic pupil is similarly typical in its emphasis:

whatever exhortations (οἱ παραινούμενοι) he is persuaded are true, these he must follow out in life (βίος); for only in this way will anyone profit from philosophy, if to sound teachings one adds works (τὰ ἔργα) in harmony with them.³⁴

²⁸ Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 94.27, 55, cf. 34.2.

²⁹ As Epictetus observes (*Diatribae* 2.11.8-9), it is in the application of principles, not so much in the interpretation of the principles themselves, that confusion and disputes arise.

³⁰ Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 17.2-5; Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 94.52. Dio (*Orationes* 27.7-10) notes that philosophic therapy is most needful and most readily accepted in times of doubt or difficulty.

³¹ Cf. Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 95.1. For the basic terminology, including comments on form and function, see Gammie, "Paraenetic Literature," 41-77.

³² "[P]hilosophers look at events from a distance and examine into what their character is in the abstract; for it is much better to have already deliberated about everything a long time in advance and since they have already reached a decision, to be able, when the moment for any action has come, with full knowledge either to handle the situation themselves or to give advice (*παραινεῖν*) to others." Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 22.4.

³³ Cf. Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 17.2; Pliny, *Epistulae* 8.24.1.

³⁴ Musonius Rufus, *Fragmenta* 1.5.15-1.6.3; my translation.

Paraenesis concerns itself with moral decision-making and moral action throughout life, with the palpable progress of an individual as evidenced in day-to-day situations.³⁵

This leads to the topic of how paraenetic authors sought to influence the thought and behavior of those being addressed. As stated earlier, philosophic mentors by and large issued moral exhortation to students who were to some degree already secure in the teachings and ethos of the school and who already acknowledged the authority of their teachers but were struggling with their *προκοπή*.³⁶ Paraenesis calls upon such students to ponder the significance of these prior personal commitments as they bear upon a current circumstance or issue and act accordingly.³⁷ In constructing such an appeal, the author of a paraenetic text conveys predominately material that is already familiar to the recipients, material expressing patterns of conduct commonly accepted within the movement, as opposed to concentrating on novel, debatable, or speculative concepts that require special proof or further study.³⁸ Thus from the readers' perspective what is said in a paraenetic text appears self-evident and uncontroversial, and so lengthy arguments are rendered unnecessary.³⁹ Indeed, the moral norms articulated by paraenetic discourse are regularly predicated upon widely accepted ideas as to what constitutes proper conduct.⁴⁰ In connection with this, pertinent doctrinal issues that may undergird paraenetic exhortation are for the most part simply assumed or expressed in abbreviated form, rather than spelled out in meticulous detail.⁴¹ Also, the pragmatic dimensions of

³⁵ The presupposition being that if philosophy is to be worth anything at all it must apply to every aspect of life; see, e.g., Plutarch, *De Profectibus in Virtute* 79F-80A; cf. Philo, *De Mutatione Nominum* 236 ff.

³⁶ "[T]he guidance of neophytes at the early stages of liminality is also applicable to the more mature since they can lapse. Psychagogy is thus a process that continues well beyond an initiatory phase." Glad, *Paul*, 59.

³⁷ Pliny, *Epistulae* 8.24, which consists almost entirely of "reminders," is typical of the paraenetic style. As Aune (*Literary Environment*, 191) observes, paraenesis can also seek to provide a basis of agreement in potentially divisive situations.

³⁸ Cf. Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 94.45: "Virtue is divided into two parts – contemplation of the truth and conduct. Training (*institutio*) teaches contemplation, and admonition (*admonitio*) teaches conduct."

³⁹ That paraenesis conveys nothing new: Plato, *Phaedo* 115B; Isocrates, *Ad Nicoclem* 40-41; Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 3.25-27, 13.14-15, 17.1-2; Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 94.27-29; Leo G. Perdue, "Paraenesis and the Epistle of James," *JNW* 72 (1981) 242-245; Malherbe, "Hellenistic Moralists," 280-282; cf. Plutarch, *De Tranquillitate Animi* 465A.

⁴⁰ As Pseudo-Isocrates says in *Ad Demonicum* 51-52, the paraenetic author will avail himself of every useful source of moral knowledge, regardless of its ultimate origin. Cf. Stowers, *Letter Writing*, 95: "paraenesis concerns those basic and unquestioned patterns of behavior which are sanctioned by honor and shame."

⁴¹ Despite their traditional and generally acceptable qualities, though, precepts

such communication are by no means incidental to their character. In any attempt to transform belief into action for a particular individual or group of individuals, close attention must be paid to the persuasive aspects of the appeal, to the manner in which the listener will be moved to respond. The paraenetic approach, then, is both therapeutic and rhetorical, as the spiritual guide aims for a presentation that is striking and inspiring, an aid to the process of interiorizing teachings so as to amend one's life.⁴²

The comments made so far should suffice as an indication of the importance of remembrance in the strategy of moral philosophy, of bringing to mind ideas and lessons of the past and consolidating them so as to make them relevant to what one says and does in the present. While this task of remembrance and reappropriation could take on complex and varying characteristics,⁴³ the corpus of paraenesis en bloc displays an interest, it seems, in recalling in particular four components of the philosophic journey, though frequently two or more of these components could be integrated. It should be emphasized that the conversion experience itself figures prominently as a point of departure for all of these components of remembrance. The components are: (1) remembrance of what conversion had accomplished or should have accomplished for the direction of one's life, principally in the area of morality; (2) remembrance of the movement's fundamental teachings, creeds, conventions, and so forth, the philosophic system one had learned during and since conversion; (3) remembrance of the teachers who had facilitated conversion and provided instruction and nurturing in accordance with the tenets of the school; (4) remembrance of one's experiences within the movement since conversion, both positive and negative, and on the nature of one's philosophic growth. Let us examine these four components individually and in greater detail; later they will be applied to the discussion of our text, Colossians.

I. As mentioned above, for the philosophic schools conversion meant no less than the re-creation of an individual's whole self, an

are still chosen and designed with specific cases in mind, e.g., Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 64.6-10, 84.5-8, 11, 94.31, 35. Cf. above, p. 59.

⁴² Emphasized by Rutherford, *Meditations*, 4 (with n. 8), 13-14, and passim; Nussbaum, *Therapy*, 330, 486-487, and passim; cf. Hijmans, "Ἀσκησις," 59-63.

⁴³ On the place of memory in moral philosophy: Plato, *Meno* 80E-82A; Epictetus, *Diatribae* 3.25.1-10; Philo, *De Virtutibus* 176; Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 17.1-6; Maximus of Tyre, *Orationes* 10.8; Iamblichus, *De Vita Pythagorica* 29.164-166; Hijmans, "Ἀσκησις," 69-70, 80; Malherbe, "Hellenistic Moralists," 286, n. 82; Thom, *Golden Verses*, 38-39, 42, 87, 165-166; Nussbaum, *Therapy*, 132-133. Conversely, the fool can be defined as one who is unable to render an accounting of his life: Plutarch, *De Tranquillitate Animi* 473C-D; Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 20.4-6.

event that could be signified as a "turning" from the past, with its turmoil and insanity, to a new and meaningful course in life. One strategy frequently adopted by paraenetic authors involved reminding students of the personal transformation that conversion had wrought for them (in fact or in theory), underscoring the contrast between their philosophic and their pre-philosophic modes of existence. It was understood as paramount that through their everyday comportment neophytes ratify their initial commitment to philosophy, habituating their new status. Otherwise they risked slipping back into the very condition from which philosophy had saved them. In *Diatribae* 2.17.36-37, for instance, Epictetus reviles his pupils for evading an authentic conversion, for failing to make a clean break with the past. If progress is to be achieved, he says, students must realize in themselves a permanent revision of interests, desires, and choices.⁴⁴

This sort of experience could be described in terms of the "death" of the novice's previous identity and the corresponding new birth that accords with the transformation conversion effects.⁴⁵ In this spirit, Seneca describes in *Epistulae Morales* 6.1 how he himself has been "transfigured" by philosophy.⁴⁶ Metaphorical images like this make "going back" seem unimaginable. In training others, it appears that the philosophers needed to be vigilant in reminding students about this fact of radical and lasting change. In so doing, they often emphasized that the new responsibilities students accept as a result of conversion frequently clash with the norms that ruled their previous lives, norms determined by external, societal pressures. A vital function of paraenesis is to aid adherents in defining their new, post-conversion relationship with the dominant culture, as they integrate competing values into a meaningful plan of action. In this sense, the "then-now" distinction made by moral philosophers regarding conversion dovetails with the distinction they also drew between those who are "inside" the movement and those who are "outside."

II. A critical function for every paraenetic text involves reminding the addressees of the actual teachings that they had learned during

⁴⁴ Cf. Epictetus, *Diatribae* 3.22.13; Malherbe, *Paul*, 38.

⁴⁵ On death as a metaphor for the morally transformed life see A.J.M. Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection: Studies in Pauline Theology against its Graeco-Roman Background* (WUNT 44; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1987) 63, 384; Perdue, "Social Character," 10; idem, "Death of the Sage," 82; David E. Aune, "Human Nature and Ethics in Hellenistic Philosophical Traditions and Paul: Some Issues and Problems," in Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul*, 305-312.

⁴⁶ On the *animus transfiguratus* see, for instance, Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 6.1-2, 94.48, and Hans Dieter Betz, "Christianity as Religion: Paul's Attempt at Definition in Romans," *JR* 71 (1991) 338-339; cf. Wilson, *Love*, 138.

and since their conversion to the philosophic movement. The fear motivating this practice appears to have been not so much that students would forget the principles of the system to which they ascribed, but rather that they needed encouragement in the application of these principles. When the latter was in fact done, the nature and the purpose of the teachings themselves gained clarity, and the students would begin taking palpable steps in their education, molding their personalities to fit their beliefs.⁴⁷ The paraenetic epistle of the Neoplatonic philosopher Porphyry to Marcella exemplifies many of the features associated with this practice. In this text, Porphyry wants to help train Marcella in his own mode of life, one that is directed towards personal piety and self-control, and the philosophic doctrines that undergird this life. The impetus for the letter is a separation (of unspecified duration) that she must endure from the author, the man who is not simply her philosophic mentor, but also her husband of ten months.⁴⁸ The epistle urges Marcella to overcome the anxious difficulties that confront her during this absence. It does so by outlining what she had learned from Porphyry prior to his departure and by exhorting her to actualize this teaching independently. As befits its intention, the text surveys many of the movement's basic doctrines – in such areas as metaphysics, anthropology, and so forth – but these tenets are not elaborated on or justified by the master. Rather they are presented in a condensed, formulaic style that would be fully intelligible only to someone already well-versed in the Neoplatonic curriculum.⁴⁹ Indeed, the author states on a number of occasions that he speaks to Marcella by way of reminder, and that these are matters to which she has formerly consented and dedicated herself, for example, 4.64-67:

...the best I can do is to exhort you (παραινέσαιμ') to adhere to the

⁴⁷ Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 94.47: "you must learn first, then strengthen your learning by action." On the goal of uniting precept and practice in one's moral training see Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 2.171-174.

⁴⁸ On their unconventional marriage see Kathleen O'Brien Wicker, *Porphyry the Philosopher: To Marcella* (SBLTT 28; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987) 4-10. Its primary motivation appears to have been to train Marcella in philosophy and to secure the best interests of her seven children; the marriage was probably a spiritual relationship that did not involve sexual relations, in a manner consistent with the encratism of Neoplatonic philosophy; the indignation of those who did not approve of the arrangement may have been due, in part, to concerns regarding the remarriage itself, the estates of the children, or the estate that Marcella herself received upon the death of her first husband.

⁴⁹ On these traditional doctrines see Wicker, *To Marcella*, 17-21; R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (London: Duckworth, 1972) 94-118, 134-137, and s.v. Porphyry; Andrew Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974) 1-80.

precepts imparted in the past ten months you have been wed to me, and not to throw away...what you already have as well.⁵⁰

The contents of the letter bear this observation out, as Porphyry draws extensively from traditional materials, mainly of a gnomic nature. In a manner consistent with the paraenetic mode of address, though, these materials do not always adhere strictly to Neoplatonic dogma. For instance, Porphyry avails himself of one or more anthologies of Neopythagorean aphorisms quite like those surviving in the *Sententiae* of Sextus (a Christian document), the *Sententiae* of Cleitarchus, and the so-called "*Sententiae* of the Pythagoreans."⁵¹ It seems that Porphyry incorporates precepts from an Epicurean collection of some kind as well.⁵² The ideological eclecticism that such borrowing betokens is by no means uncommon in paraenetic discourse, especially since the content of the moral advice proffered by the different philosophic movements of the Hellenistic age overlapped considerably. The author's tacit openness to the advice of philosophers from outside his own school demonstrates what his exhortation shares with the norms, especially the moral norms, of the wider philosophic culture. This lends to what is said a broader sense of authority and acceptability, hinting at its universal applicability, and assists the reader in situating the vocation recommended by the sage within the prevailing expectations and aspirations of society. While it is incontestable that Porphyry charts a course for his spouse that is not easy, and that he has his share of critics, implicit in the text's content and mode of composition is the argument that this form of life does in certain regards meet these sorts of expectations and aspirations.

III. Another topic for remembrance in philosophic paraenesis centers on the teachers who had facilitated the conversion of the addressees and had instructed them since that time. Recollection of these relationships could influence neophytes deeply, since they were at a vulnerable and formative stage and in need of moral guidance. In the proem of the epistle to his wife, for instance, Porphyry speaks at length about himself and his personal relationship with Marcella. The apparent objective is to warrant his role as a concerned and upright instructor, disclaiming any self-serving motives for marrying her and recounting the personal opposition he had experienced be-

⁵⁰ Cf. Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 3.46-51, 5.77-82, 8.137-142, 9.163-166, 10.187-191, 20.322-326, 331-333, 32.499-501.

⁵¹ See, e.g., Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 11.198-13.233; Edouard des Places, *Porphyre: Vie de Pythagore, Lettre à Marcella* (Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1982) 94-100.

⁵² See esp. Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 27.427-31.483, with Henry C. Chadwick, *The Sentences of Sextus: A Contribution to the Early Christian History of Ethics* (TextsS 5; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959) 141-153.

cause of their relationship, including even death threats (1.1-3.51). This rather substantial account, almost apologetic in tone, constructs a positive personal image of the teacher which reinforces the instruction that follows, validating Porphyry as the only individual whom Marcella can trust, over against his detractors.

By creating this form of self-legitimation within a pedagogical setting, Porphyry participates in the widespread procedure evident in psychagogy of calling upon adherents to remember the character and words of their absent teacher, even using these as topics for meditation.⁵³ It was in some instances thought to be desirable that students choose for a subject of remembrance exemplary persons whom they had not ever seen or met. In this fashion the images and words of even the long dead, working in the recollections of students, become available to them as regulators and standards for moral development. Seneca, for one, recommends to Lucilius that he revere the memory of Epicurus, Cato, and others who have passed away. "Choose a master," he writes, "whose life, conversation, and soul-expressing face have satisfied you; picture him always to yourself as your protector and your pattern."⁵⁴ As he explains elsewhere, "we can get assistance not only from the living, but from those of the past."⁵⁵

IV. Another prominent category for remembrance in paraenesis focuses on the experiences of students themselves since joining the philosophic movement and their progress (or lack thereof) as evidenced in these experiences. Moral philosophers regularly combated complacency among their followers. For a thinker like Seneca, simply observing the status quo was completely unacceptable as a principle for personal achievement within a philosophic environment: "no one can resume his progress at the point where he left off." Rather,

that which is short of perfection must necessarily be unsteady, at one time progressing, at another slipping or growing faint; and it will surely slip back unless it keeps struggling ahead; for if a man slackens at all in zeal and faithful application, he must retrograde.⁵⁶

Hence exemplary pupils, according to this assumption, are constantly aware of the progress they make and are always taking stock

⁵³ Lucian, *Nigrinus* 6-7; Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 11.8-10 (cf. 25.5-6, 32.1, 52.7-10, 94.55-59); Marcus Aurelius, *Ad Se Ipsum* 6.30; Malherbe, *Paul*, 53, 67; and cf. Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 10.176-183.

⁵⁴ Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 11.10; cf. Hadot, *Seneca*, 164.

⁵⁵ Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 52.7; cf. Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 10.185-186 (on following the example of Plato).

⁵⁶ Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 71.35; cf. Plutarch, *De Profectibus in Virtute* 76D-E.

of their own character as a barometer of that progress. In the opinion of ancient philosophers, such self-evaluation provided an essential vehicle for self-improvement. Ideally, neophytes should grow adept at exposing and remedying their own errors, even as they draw strength from their successes.⁵⁷ Philosophers therefore often instructed students to examine their personal progress and, in conjunction with this, provided them with criteria for conducting such examinations.⁵⁸

In his *De Profectibus in Virtute*, to take one case, Plutarch has designed a practical manual for detecting and evaluating one's προκοπή as a guide to philosophic self-development.⁵⁹ His basic plan (after first critiquing Stoic notions that progress cannot be measured) is simply to list those signs by which the neophyte can indeed perceive progress. Among these indicators he notes the following: a uniformity and continuity in following the course (πορεία) and way (ὁδός) of philosophy (76C); possession of the inner strength to overcome series of obstacles and distractions, including separation of the student from philosophic discourse and interchange (77B-C) or the disconcerting scoffings of outsiders (78B). According to the tractate, the individual who is making satisfactory progress ceases to cherish everything that the general public admires and is willing even to condemn public opinion when faithfully supporting his or her convictions makes this necessary (78C). Because it is essential to their personal growth, students should exhibit perseverance (ὑπομονή) in submitting to the correction and admonition (νουθετεῖν) of their teachers (82A, C). Serious students, says Plutarch, are to seek the truth and the substance of virtue, rather than its external advantages, shunning ostentation, vanity, and contentiousness (78E-79C). The purpose of philosophy is not δόξα, but rather the true sage is ταπεινός ("humble") and demonstrates forbearance (ἐπιείκεια) and gentleness (πραότης), keeping his accomplishments to himself like the secrets of one of the mysteries.⁶⁰ A further sign of progress becomes visible when the judgments (κρίσεις) that pupils make correspond to their actions

⁵⁷ Cf. Nussbaum, *Therapy*, 327-329.

⁵⁸ In many respects self-evaluation and self-advancement constitute the *sine qua non* of the psychagogical process; see Paul Rabbow, *Seelenführung: Methodik der Exerzitien in der Antike* (München: Kösel, 1954) 180-188; Hijmans, "Άσκησις," 87-91; Hadot, *Seneca*, 66-71; Pierre Courcelle, *Connais-toi toi-même de Socrate à Saint Bernard* (3 vols.; Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1974-1975) 1.50-53. A classic and frequently cited example of such self-examination is *Carmen Aureum* 40-44, for which see Thom, *Golden Verses*, 163-167. In Philo's corpus see, e.g., *De Decalogo* 96-101.

⁵⁹ William C. Grese, "De Profectibus in Virtute (Moralia 75A-86A)," in Betz, *Plutarch's Ethical Writings*, 11-31.

⁶⁰ Plutarch, *De Profectibus in Virtute* 80B, 80E-81E; cf. Epictetus, *Encheiridion* 48.2.

(ἔργα: 84B); the wisdom possessed by students, then, does not consist merely of abstract belief or affirmation, but they arrive at their moral convictions by putting them to the test of life.⁶¹ Finally, the aspirant who is advancing remembers righteous figures of the past – especially those who endured affliction on account of their virtue – and reflects on how he or she might have responded to the challenges that they overcame.⁶²

While the practice of congratulating aspirants on their spiritual and moral growth, and encouraging them to do more, was integral to the paraenetic style, it was also possible for philosophers to criticize followers who failed to show signs of progress or whose current behavior was not commensurate with the standards they had once endorsed. An illustration of remembrance in this more admonitory tone comes from *Diatribae* 4.9 of Epictetus.⁶³ Here the instructor attempts to reclaim a struggling pupil by urging him to recollect his initial commitment to philosophy and to compare the habits he adopted at that time with his present demeanor. In the beginning of his philosophic journey, Epictetus contends, this novice was led by a sense of self-respect and faithfulness, as he read the works of the famous sages with admiration. But lately he has exchanged these virtues for vanity, greed, and licentiousness, losing the ability to behave like “a good man.” Epictetus implores this person to help himself, first by condemning the lapses that have occurred, then, once the verdict has been passed, by training himself like an athlete trains his body. Success in this undertaking is entirely possible because the student already knows the way to the truth – as Epictetus points out, “both damnation and salvation are within you.”⁶⁴ It would appear that there is little in the master’s words that the addressee has not heard before. The objective is not to convey new information, but to open the student’s eyes to the crisis in his conduct, reawakening in him a sense of shame and responsibility, and to identify the root of the trouble as lying within the student himself. In a sense, Epictetus holds forth as a moral paradigm to recall and emulate the man’s own personal experience. The listing of moral qualities in § 17 summarizes the two options, one connected with virtue and the student’s past, the other with vice and the student’s present.

⁶¹ Plutarch, *De Profectibus in Virtute* 79F-80A, 84B; cf. Epictetus, *Encheiridion* 51.

⁶² Plutarch, *De Profectibus in Virtute* 84B-85B, 85D.

⁶³ Hijmans, “*Ἀσκησις*,” 94-98.

⁶⁴ Epictetus, *Diatribae* 4.9.16.

Conversion, Paraenesis, and Worldview

The discussion above shows how conversion to a philosophic school entailed for aspirants a personal transformation, the adoption of a new spiritual, noetic, and ethical approach to life. Concurrently, this change meant also that neophytes became in an important sense at odds with the cognitive and behavioral systems at work among both competing philosophic movements and the general population. As part of their indoctrination, neophytes were compelled to replace previously cherished ideas about what defined success with goals fixed according to a higher and more difficult path. Indeed, converts to a philosophic school did not merely adopt a new mode of existence, but with it a new and foundational worldview. By this I refer to a person's comprehensive and pre-reflective understanding of reality, an integrating framework of fundamental considerations which gives context, direction, and meaning to life in light of one's ultimate commitments.⁶⁵ This is a particular way of looking at the world, of integrating different provinces of knowledge and experience into a symbolic totality, a symbolic universe. Functionally, this universe serves as a map of fact and value for a person, legitimating all roles, priorities, and institutions by situating them in the context of the broadest horizon of reference conceivable, bestowing meaning on all domains of life. In adopting the elements of a worldview cognitively and normatively, individuals are able to "locate" themselves; all of history and the entire biography of the individual are seen as events occurring in this world.

For the analytical task, it is important to distinguish the worldview embraced by an individual from any codified or explicitly developed explanation of reality that he or she may acknowledge, the latter belonging to the domain of ideology (see below).⁶⁶ For most people, worldview is so internalized that it goes entirely unquestioned and unexamined; it is only in times of severe personal crisis (such as the process of conversion) that it comes to the fore, subject to significant reconception.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ For basic discussion see Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction*, 85-118; W.T. Jones, "World Views: Their Nature and Their Function," *Current Anthropology* 13 (1972) 87-108; Ninian Smart, *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1983) 1-36.

⁶⁶ Cf. Albert M. Wolters, "On the Idea of Worldview and Its Relation to Philosophy," *Stained Glass: Worldviews and Social Science* (ed. Paul A. Marshall, et al.; Lanham: University Press of America, 1989) 14-25.

⁶⁷ Philosophers seem to have been well aware that they held forth to students a new and comprehensive "view" of the cosmos and of the place of people in it. In *Epistulae Morales* 90.26-29, for instance, Seneca contends that philosophy "shows us

As neophytes experience this process of worldview reconception, they become involved in organizing for themselves what amounts to another *nomos*, a total concept of order for structuring all personal obligations and objectives, including indicators as to sanctions and rewards.⁶⁸ Worldview, in other words, functions not only descriptively, showing how everything "fits" together, but especially prescriptively, indicating the proper moral purpose and province of everything. Philo, for instance, on numerous occasions refers to commands of Torah as paraenesis. This normative tradition, inferring a distinct understanding of the world and the role of human beings in its cosmic and moral matrix, furnishes for obedient Jews the symbols and categories that they need to make sense of life.⁶⁹ In this context the bearing of worldview on one's social orientation can be appreciated. "Since a worldview gives terms of reference by which the world and our place in it can be structured and illumined," writes James Olthuis, "a worldview binds its adherents together into a community."⁷⁰ What perhaps most unites the members of a particular movement and distinguishes them from outsiders is their shared worldview, a unique conception of reality and human existence.

In line with its overall concern with indoctrination and guidance, philosophic paraenesis assists neophytes in the process of disengaging from one worldview and appropriating a new one. This would entail also providing neophytes with the criteria necessary for distinguishing the two orders of reality and with the motivation to follow through on their decision to transfer.⁷¹ The ultimate consolidation of this transaction is rendered problematic, though, because for an ini-

what things are evil and what things are seemingly evil; she strips our minds of vain illusion...she delivers to us the knowledge of the whole of nature...[s]he discloses to us what the gods are and what sort they are...Such are wisdom's rites of initiation, by means of which is unlocked, not a village shrine, but the vast temple of all the gods – the universe itself, whose true apparitions and true aspects she offers to the gaze of our minds. For the vision of our eyes is too dull for sights so great." Cf. Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus* 1.36-40.

⁶⁸ Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967) 19-25; Hadot, *Exercices Spirituels*, 181-182; Perdue, "Social Character," 24-25.

⁶⁹ Philo, *De Agricultura* 84, *Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres Sit* 114, *De Decalogo* 39, 82, 100, *De Praemiis et Poenis* 83, 156, cf. Gammie, "Paraenetic Literature," 55; Quinn, "Paraenesis," 192-193.

⁷⁰ James H. Olthuis, "On Worldviews," in Marshall, *Stained Glass*, 29 (cf. 26-39); Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction*, 94-95.

⁷¹ Teachers generally presented the philosophic vocation as the only means of achieving self-reflection and self-awareness so as to comprehend the truth. The image of life as a fair, for instance, was popular; unlike the masses, busy with buying and selling, the philosopher contemplates the "big picture," the underlying order and nature of human existence: Epictetus, *Diatribae* 2.14.23-29; Iamblichus, *De Vita Pythagorica* 12.58-59.

tiate the old worldview still holds a certain attraction, representing as it does accustomed values and mores, while the new worldview is not yet completely internalized, and some of the limitations and difficulties associated with its way of life are beginning to become apparent.⁷² Thus novices invariably experience a "liminal" period of some variety, during which confusion arises regarding the competing and contradictory claims of the old and the new versions of reality, leading to lapses in belief, in social cohesion, and in individual responsibility.⁷³

The philosophic guide, in response to this predicament, must offer effective instruction on reconciling these different claims and on integrating them within the rubric of the new order, so that full personal incorporation and progress within the movement can continue. As noted previously, those to whom paraenesis is directed acknowledge the authority of their philosophic system, but lack resolve in the affirmation of their beliefs in specific instances of moral judgment. Another way of putting this is that for the initiate the internalization of the new worldview is an incomplete and ongoing project. His or her worldview must be constantly adjusted and updated, as it were, modified so that it is viable and functioning, cohering with actual experiences and personal wisdom.⁷⁴ As a mode of instruction, paraenesis addresses this need by helping aspirants (for whom the process of adjustment can be especially difficult) to abstract from their learning and experiences within the school an understanding of the world and their place in it, assigning to that world both the objective status of self-evident reality and the subjective status of a personal, internalized reality.⁷⁵ In connection with this, paraenesis can foster in the aspirant a recognition of indeterminacy as part of its process of indoctrination and education, strengthening his or her model of reality and making it more adaptive to the moral exigencies of the day-to-day world. The impact of paraenetic directives on conduct is enhanced insofar as one's recognition of particular obligations regularly involves an inferred acknowledgment that the broader structures that order society and the powers and priori-

⁷² Quinn, "Paraenesis," 196: "The society or world which the one undergoing socialization is in some sense leaving has become inadequate and unsatisfactory; but leaving it is traumatic, for the former order too had its meaning, its directives, its values, its unquestioned presuppositions." Cf. Philo's analysis of the converted life in *De Praemiis et Poenis* 16-21.

⁷³ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969, 1987) 94-130.

⁷⁴ Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 16-22; cf. Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction*, 98.

⁷⁵ Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 11-16, 32; Perdue, "Social Character," 24.

ties that govern those structures are inevitable or "natural." The practical objective, finally, is to bring all aspects of experience into alignment with ultimate commitments informed by this acknowledgment.⁷⁶ As neophytes progress, their appropriation of the movement's worldview becomes more concrete and inveterate; they intuitively view themselves as part of the new moral order. The challenge for the paraenetic guide is to show the neophyte how the course recommended by the movement in response to specific situations of conduct coheres meaningfully with the new worldview.

The effectiveness of a paraenetic message, then, depends to a significant extent upon the ability of its readers to inculcate the knowledge and ethos of the worldview it endorses. It is in this capacity that paraenetic authors busy themselves with furnishing an ideological foundation and context for the moral formation of their students.⁷⁷ By ideology I mean the consensual and reflective system of beliefs and concepts by which adherents self-consciously construct, articulate, and defend their worldview and critically react to other worldviews. The ideology of any given movement is identical to the sum of philosophic doctrines and opinions as understood and expressed by members of that movement. Thus each of the movements we have encountered so far, Stoicism, Epicureanism, Neoplatonism, and so on, not only exhibits its own worldview, but also develops its own ideology that assumes and legitimates that worldview.⁷⁸ Here apologetic and normative implications gain greater explicitness; each ideology commends an ideal way of life, understood to be an authentic expression of the adherents' vision of ultimate reality, of the sheer actuality of things. Ideology gives expression to that vision in a manner intended to evaluate and influence thought and action on all levels of human existence.⁷⁹

Consequently, moral exhortation in a philosophic milieu will make or refer to certain doctrinal assumptions pertaining to the cos-

⁷⁶ Cf. Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 71.2: "As often as you wish to know what is to be avoided or what is to be sought, consider its relation to the Supreme Good, to the purpose of your whole life. For whatever we do ought to be in harmony with this... The reason we make mistakes is because we all consider the parts of life, but never life as a whole."

⁷⁷ For useful discussions of the meaning and application of the term "ideology" see Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction*, 113-118; Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London, New York: Verso, 1991) 1-31; Stephen Fowl, "Texts Don't Have Ideologies," *Biblical Interpretation* 3 (1995) 15-34.

⁷⁸ Individuals within a given movement could be said to express their own ideologies as well, though the group concept will be more useful for understanding conversion and the role of paraenetic discourse in it.

⁷⁹ Cf. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) 126-141.

mos, history, human society, the human self, and so forth, and develop, either explicitly or implicitly, certain models of what these elements of the worldview are or should be. Nearly all paraenetic texts, for instance, project some understanding of cosmic reality. This understanding, resting on certain philosophic tenets, functions to explain the origin, nature, and order of phenomena in the universe and the forces that regulate it. In conformity with the parameters of the paraenetic style, nothing like a comprehensive account of this reality is provided. Instead, various previously known formulae, symbols, and myths will be utilized (either indigenous to the particular movement or adapted from the popular culture) to refer to, rather than to construct, this meta-world or sub-world.⁸⁰ Within the scheme of this model, everything is assigned (or is assumed to be assigned) its proper place, time, purpose, status, and fate. This accounting of cosmic order extends naturally to an explication of the patterns and rules that govern human relationships, including such phenomena as social and religious institutions, the structuring of political power, and the norms that determine inter-personal obligations. Having reached the point where the validity of such a projected cosmic-social-anthropological order is simply assumed by the adherent, certain categories of belief and conduct appear as axiomatic insofar as they conform to that order, while variance with the postulated worldview is recognized automatically as deviant and disruptive. In this sense, for the student who inhabits the worldview of a paraenetic text, the language of ethos and the language of cosmos become mutually authorizing.⁸¹ Patterns of reality delineated by the text's ideology underpin definite expectations regarding human value, identity, and self-interest. For this reason paraenetic writers seize upon the readership's liminal experience not simply as a fitting occasion for instruction and encouragement, but also as an opportunity for ontological reconstruction, as it were. In the rhetoric of moral exhortation, "initiates are reduced to *prima materia*," as Leo Perdue puts it, "out of which new beings are created, capable of living transformed lives with different behavior patterns" within the framework of the newly-carved worldview.⁸²

Due to this experience of liminality that neophytes ordinarily endure, paraenesis necessarily takes into account, either directly or in-

⁸⁰ Cf. Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction*, 79-82, 127.

⁸¹ Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 24-27, 33-34; Claudia V. Camp, "A Feminist Response: Paraenesis: Method, Form, and Act," *Semeia* 50 (1990) 246.

⁸² Perdue, "Social Character," 10.

directly, opposed versions of comprehensive reality.⁸³ Moral philosophers for this reason often depict their ideological position as vying for recognition in a competitive field, and their exhortation implies to the addressees a challenge to align themselves accordingly. Ideological construction in paraenetic texts is therefore fundamentally antithetical in nature, as authors endeavor to legitimate one worldview while subverting others. In most cases, the author represents the counter-order as expressive of the general public – whose opinions ordinarily would have determined the outlook of the students before conversion – though in other instances the descriptions of reality promoted by other schools are taken into consideration. While this sort of interface, characteristic of paraenetic texts, often constructs itself antithetically, it is probably best understood for reasons of interpretation as a critical dialectic. In other words, the ideology assumed by a paraenetic text is never wholly distinct and novel, but is predicated upon a discriminating conversation with other ideologies, where some aspects of other systems are affirmed, some are corrected and modified, some are ignored, and some are rejected outright. As mentioned earlier, paraenetic writings normally make use of concepts, traditions, and examples that are generally approved by the prevailing culture. This was desirable, if for no other reason, so that the idiom and agenda of those writings would be intelligible and inviting to individuals who originated from that culture.⁸⁴ Also contributing to its broader and more primary outlook is the reliance of moral exhortation in expressing worldview on formulaic references, on allusion to what is already known, and on elementary principles, as opposed to a comprehensive presentation of doctrine using specialized language. On the other hand, paraenetic documents orient themselves generally towards questions of ethics, and, in contrast to questions of dogma, there was widespread agreement in ancient philosophic circles regarding many of the fundamental objectives of the moral life (to aspire to virtue, to observe one's duties, and so forth), if not on the best mechanisms for achieving these objectives. So it is fair to say that all moral philosophers participate in an ongoing discussion taking place in the wider culture concerning worldview and ethics, but this participation constitutes a

⁸³ Perdue, "Social Character," 25: "Different social realities may be reflected explicitly in paraenetic texts intending to reject 'false' alternatives and to accept the 'true' one." Cf. Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction*, 99-100; Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 31, 47-48.

⁸⁴ Seneca's *De Ira* shows how adroitly this principle could be applied in practice; see the analysis in Nussbaum, *Therapy*, 402-438, cf. 332, 351-352.

critical engagement that is informed by each thinker's special ideological assumptions.

This sort of dialectic appears to one degree or another in an area of vital interest for all paraenetic authors, the characterization of their reader's "status" (often δόξα in Greek)⁸⁵ and their attempts to influence how the reader evaluates status itself as a concept. This interest relates directly to philosophic efforts at revising and reinforcing the worldview embraced by converts by way of moral exhortation. Then as now, status was a matter of serious and lifelong concern, indicating as it did one's perceived position in the world and the power and recognition that accompany that position. Any complex civilization exhibits a diversification of social, economic, and personal roles. A host of factors determines these roles, including such items as an individual's place of origin, age, sex, occupation, wealth, legal standing, or membership in religious and civic organizations. Because any one person will acknowledge a number of overlapping identities, as well as the responsibilities they entail, the dimensions of both status and moral conduct for that person will be defined in different, sometimes inconsistent ways.⁸⁶ In Greco-Roman society an added uncertainty emerges insofar as status elevation was relatively inhibited, owing to the rigid social, cultural, and political structures that were in place. As a consequence, many individuals experienced "status dissonance" – that is to say, their status was ambiguous because they aspired to and showed some signs of a position in the world that was higher than that to which they in fact belonged.⁸⁷ Such tensions pertaining to status and responsibility constituted the sort of issue with which all ancient people had to contend, but they became especially acute for the initiates of a philosophic school and their mentors.⁸⁸ Converts were compelled to undergo a profound shift of status, and no doubt the disorientation that accompanied this shift contributed significantly to their feelings of alienation. In rapport with the procedures of spiritual therapy, moral guides would indicate to those under their care the philosophic criteria by which they ought to revise their understanding of status. This would not only entail a description of the neophytes' new and "bet-

⁸⁵ See LSJ 444 (s.v. δόξα III).

⁸⁶ Perdue, "Social Character," 19.

⁸⁷ Meeks (*Urban Christians*, 22-23, 73, 191) applies this description to members of Paul's churches: "their achieved status is higher than their attributed status."

⁸⁸ On the opposition of philosophers to public criteria of δόξα see, e.g., Pseudo-Crates, *Epistulae* 16; Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 13.31; Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 44.6, 102.8-19, 123.6; Plutarch, *De Profectibus in Virtute* 78E-81C; Lucian, *Nigrinus* 4; Iamblichus, *De Vita Pythagorica* 31.200; cf. Nussbaum, *Therapy*, 354-357.

ter" status, but would include also efforts at redefining their conception of status itself, so as to make a break from previously held assumptions and from the opinions of society at large which, as we saw above, often held philosophers in low esteem.⁸⁹ The criteria identified by the teacher would generally be consistent with the worldview upheld by the philosophic movement. Consequently, status in this context refers not only to one's position within the school (based, say, on one's progress) but more importantly to one's position in society, in the cosmos, vis-à-vis the gods and other people, and would impact the evaluation of one's own inherent value as well.⁹⁰

Porphyry's paraenetic epistle to his wife Marcella illustrates in several ways how ideology and presuppositions regarding worldview can inform moral exhortation in a philosophic milieu. As mentioned previously, through this letter Porphyry conveys shorthand reminders of those Neoplatonic doctrines which form the basis of the philosophic life Marcella should practice as a novice in his absence. These reminders, as modern studies of the *Ad Marcellam* have demonstrated, imply a Neoplatonic worldview consistent with Porphyry's philosophic system as manifested in his other writings. Intrinsic to this version of reality is a pronounced metaphysical dualism, a strong distinction between two levels of existence. On one hand, there is the intelligible world of the divine, which is eternal and immutable. Opposite this there is the irrational world of sense-perception, of decay and corruption. The human soul, according to Neoplatonic mythology, has its origin in the former realm, and so is in nature spiritual, rational, and immortal. But somehow the soul has fallen or descended into the latter world, where it is joined to a body and subject to all the harmful passions that dominate reality there.⁹¹ In order to recollect its perception of the spiritual realm and achieve salvation, the soul must follow the intellect (*ὁ νοῦς*), purge itself of physical nature's coercive powers, and so ultimately return to its place of origin, where it can be like god and achieve union with the divine.⁹² The journey to this *summum bonum* is an arduous one, however, because this state of embodiment can tyrannize the soul and lead to forgetfulness; there also exist evil daemons associated with the sensual world that can trick the soul. Thus, if it is to ascend

⁸⁹ Pace Martin, *Metaphor*, 108-113.

⁹⁰ Cf. Halvor Moxnes, "The Quest for Honor and the Unity of the Community in Romans 12 and in the Orations of Dio Chrysostom," in Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul*, 203-230.

⁹¹ E.g., Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 32.484-33.517.

⁹² E.g., Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 15.262-17.291; cf. Walter Pötscher, *Porphyrios: PROS MARCELLAN* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969) 83-85.

in its journey, the soul must demonstrate fortitude in concentrating on the processes of pure reason, in abiding by a regimen of self-control, and in rebutting the corrupting, irrational forces of the material world.⁹³

While there is little question that Porphyry assumes a schema for understanding comprehensive reality similar to the one sketched above, his point in the epistle is not to depict such a worldview in full, but to show how the doctrines associated with this schema should inform Marcella's mode of life. The document's moral advice, then, is characterized by efforts to relate affirmations apropos of the philosophic movement's explanation of objective reality to Marcella's personal internalization and actualization of these affirmations as a neophyte.⁹⁴ In this manner Porphyry effectively sets the experiences of his wife's own practical and distinct search for personal salvation within the ontological framework of Neoplatonism.⁹⁵ For example, Porphyry makes use of Marcella's marriage to him and his absence from her as a model of the philosophic life. His recent journey and separation from Marcella parallel the fall of the soul into the body, while his subsequent efforts to return to her mirror the journey of the soul back to its true home.⁹⁶ For her part, Marcella's pain at separation from her husband-mentor is explained as a recognition of the nature and extent of the soul's fall (5.70-77). Similarly, the difficulties she endures as a result of her marriage to Porphyry and their separation are interpreted in light of the constant struggle required of the soul to free itself of dominating physical influences.⁹⁷

Although the *Ad Marcellam* invites its reader to participate in a version of worldview with distinctively Neoplatonic contours, this view at the same time engages in dialogue with other explanations of reality. As noted above, the text borrows substantially from Neopythagorean and Epicurean traditions, which would naturally assume their own ideologies. This borrowing on the part of Porphyry appears to be part of a larger synthesizing enterprise, one that relates broadly accepted religious and moral ideals to the specific Neoplatonic agenda of the letter, critically integrating them into a coherent plan of action for the recipient. The results of this effort surface

⁹³ E.g., Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 6.99-114; on wicked daemons see, e.g., 20.320-21.348.

⁹⁴ One predictable consequence of the paraenetic style with its need for simplification is that not all the metaphysical doctrines of the system are presented, for instance, those relating to the first principles of being; see Wicker, *To Marcella*, 21.

⁹⁵ Smith, *Porphyry's Place*, 145.

⁹⁶ E.g., Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 5.68-77, 9.166-10.185.

⁹⁷ E.g., Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 5.77-94, 30.465-476.

especially in the text's assumptions about what constitutes a pious and wise person, assumptions that build on prevailing societal values. Porphyry "draws upon Marcella's traditional piety," writes Kathleen O'Brien Wicker,

which dictates the appropriate ways of worshipping the divine and the ethical behavior which corresponds to those beliefs, to demonstrate for her the philosophic principles he wishes her to remember and practice.⁹⁸

However, this is hardly a blanket endorsement of what people generally regard to be piety. Rather, his philosophic principles guide Porphyry's interaction with these traditions critically. It is noteworthy, for example, that the ideology Porphyry presents is essentially constructed in antithetical terms. This is evident especially in chapters 11 through 24 of the letter, where the worldview embraced by "the sage," a generic model of virtue and piety, is contrasted with that accepted by "the fool," who represents the degenerate opinion of one overwhelmed by irrational impulses and physical cares.⁹⁹ So while it is true that the author "appears to regard traditional piety...as the best preparation for the philosophic life," in Porphyry's judgment this piety must be "properly understood and practiced" under the rubric of the Neoplatonic worldview.¹⁰⁰ This sort of critical dialectic in an exhortatory mode furnishes Marcella with guidelines for relating the beliefs and practices that governed her life before conversion to her current philosophic training. As a result, the content of her pursuit of the philosophic vocation reflects in many regards what the prevailing culture condones as tried-and-true wisdom.

It comes as no surprise that the new worldview Porphyry urges her to affirm as foundational for philosophic praxis has, as part of its purpose, significant implications for Marcella's perception of her status in the world and of status itself. In the light of the ontological structures outlined earlier, Marcella would come to an improved understanding concerning her status as a human being. This understanding would relate specifically to: (a) the identity and characteristics of her intellect, her soul, and her body, and (b) the relation of these elements of her personality to either the divine or the material aspects of reality.¹⁰¹ Within the parameters of this symbolic realm, status is properly measured by the progress one makes in ascending to the spiritual realm in accordance with the tenets of the system, as

⁹⁸ Wicker, *To Marcella*, 12-13.

⁹⁹ See below, pp. 164-165.

¹⁰⁰ Wicker, *To Marcella*, 13, cf. 4, 14.

¹⁰¹ E.g., *Ad Marcellam* 8.145-153, 13.233-14.239, 26.409-420.

opposed to any worldly standards such as wealth, which are rejected.¹⁰² Consequently, the newly found status of converts to the movement is unseen and unrecognized by outsiders, as the former reject the conventional standards of δόξα:

to the extent anyone longs for the body and the things related to the body, to that extent is he ignorant of God and darkens God's vision of him, even if in the eyes of all men he may be honored (δοξάζεται) as a god. The wise man, though recognized by a few or, if you will, even unknown (ἀγνωσούμενος) to all, is known by God.¹⁰³

Marrying Porphyry and training in compliance with his instructions also means for Marcella a new type of social status that corresponds with and helps to meet the demands of the philosophic life.¹⁰⁴ Apparently, Marcella was ostracized to some extent by fellow citizens and members of her family. It was necessary for Porphyry, as he puts it, to drive away "all those bent on mistreating you under false pretenses" and free her "from every master" (3.40-44). Acts of treachery and injustice continue to threaten her progress, which is likened to an ἄγών (5.77-94). In the absence of strong social relations of the ordinary kind, Porphyry combines in himself "the love of father as well as husband and teacher and family, and, if you will, even country" (6.95-97). The teacher-student relationship seems, from her perspective, to be all-encompassing, though we note that Marcella's new status and new comprehension of status do not abrogate all of her pre-conversion responsibilities. Her positions as a mother, slave-owner, and head of the household continue as dimensions of her identity.¹⁰⁵ Thus at least some aspects of Marcella's status in society remained basically unchanged in the aftermath of conversion, though even the duties associated with these positions must have been recognized as part of the philosophic regimen.

The Colossians as Converts

At the beginning of this chapter, the observation that all of the addressees of the epistle to the Colossians were converts to Christianity was identified as a point of comparison with the practices of instructing neophytes in Greco-Roman philosophic schools. For Christian initiates, like their counterparts in the philosophic schools, conver-

¹⁰² Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 14.245, 27.434-438.

¹⁰³ Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 13.227-233, cf. Sextus, *Sententiae* 136, 145; "Sententiae of the Pythagoreans" 92.

¹⁰⁴ Marcella may have experienced an additional sort of status dissonance insofar as she was a woman pursuing philosophy, a predominately male field.

¹⁰⁵ Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 4.59-62, 35.525-528.

sion represented a permanent threshold between one world and another which forever separated converts from outsiders, as well as from previous loyalties, values, and associations, while demanding of them a lifelong commitment to a more difficult moral path. Therefore behavior that is typically approved by outside opinion or by one's pre-conversion system of belief must be scrutinized in light of new criteria and integrated into the new worldview. So it follows that in an instructional setting the ideas and methods applicable to the process of initiation could work profoundly on the minds of neophytes, and that they could do so even long after the event of conversion itself.

As Meeks observes, remembrance of such ideas and methods as a mode of moral exhortation dominates the letter to the Colossians, which the author has filled

with language that recalls the ritual of baptism, with its images of transformation or rebirth, the restoration of primal unity, the taking off of the 'old human'...and the putting on of the 'new human'.¹⁰⁶

Reminders in the text of the experiences and instruction associated with conversion "become the basis for exhortation to the audience to maintain a standard of belief and behavior that they have previously been taught."¹⁰⁷ This was a pattern of guidance that the author had learned as a member of the Pauline school, as part of the heritage of Paul's own paraenetic style, which is exhibited among the apostle's extant writings principally in I Thessalonians.¹⁰⁸ As Meeks' comments suggest, conversion is a matter of central interest to our epistle, and we may accurately think of Colossians as a reminder of conversion, though this interest manifests itself in particular ways that serve the author's special purposes in writing.

The parameters of this interest can be better delineated by examining some of the ways that the document does *not* refer to the experience of conversion. To illustrate: the primary objective of the text is not to be observed in efforts on the writer's part to induce conversion. The letter does not contain a protreptic speech of the sort mentioned above, one that seeks to win over an uninitiated readership to a new vocation through sustained demonstration and systematic argumentation. Nor is the primary objective of the text evident in authorial efforts to describe what conversion is like, as we saw, for ex-

¹⁰⁶ Meeks, *Origins*, 34.

¹⁰⁷ Meeks, *Origins*, 94.

¹⁰⁸ Abraham Malherbe has tended to this issue through a series of articles and lectures; see the bibliography.

ample, in a conversion story. Although it bears the mark of concepts and formulae somehow associated with baptism, the central ritual of conversion in Christianity, we should bear in mind that the epistle itself refers to the rite directly only one time, in 2.12.¹⁰⁹ In fact, it is plain throughout the text that the author's concern is not to reflect on baptism or conversion per se, but on the meaning of having been baptized for Christian existence.¹¹⁰ In this regard, the instructional approach of Colossians shares with the traditions of philosophic paraenesis an interest in the long-term impact of conversion for the process of personal formation, in the remembrance of conversion and the experiences associated with it as the foundation of moral exhortation.

The employment of this sort of moral guidance, as we learned earlier, was necessitated by the condition of the students themselves, who faced an uphill climb in making legitimate progress within their movement. The problem was exacerbated both by "internal" factors, such as the difficulties of appropriating the movement's program, as well as by "external" ones, such as the absence of one's teacher-mentor or the attacks of oppositional groups. Like many moral philosophers of the time, in addressing such a situation the author of Colossians acknowledges and even underscores the optimistic and empowering consequences that conversion can have for initiates. He does so chiefly through the development and application of christological principles. Drawing from the soteriological affirmations of the hymn preserved in 1.15-20, he presumes Christ's supremacy over all beings and forces in the universe, particularly over all cosmic powers, and insists that those who belong to Christ share with him the "whole fullness of deity" (2.9) that dwells in him and, by implication, his victory over all such powers (2.15, cf. 1.16, 20). This insistence serves the writer's polemic against any notion that these powers hold sway over the readers or bar their way to the heavenly world.¹¹¹ In other words, believers share fully in Christ's victory through baptism, which manifests God's power to transform and redeem them.

Yet, despite the manifold benefits and the comprehensive renewal that (in the opinion of the author) conversion entails, it appears that the addressees of the letter continue to be in want of reminders, en-

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Dahl, *Jesus*, 17.

¹¹⁰ Wedderburn, *Theology*, 49; cf. Willi Marxsen, "Toward the New Testament Grounding of Baptism," *Jesus and the Church: The Beginnings of Christianity* (ed. and trans. Philip E. Devenish; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992) 147-171.

¹¹¹ Wedderburn, *Theology*, 48.

couragement, and even reprimands, in particular as to how their Christian beliefs should inform moral conduct in a hostile and confusing environment. Thus the argument of the epistle balances strong affirmation with correction and appeals for action. As Lars Hartman puts it, describing the attitude of our author, "the life given in baptism has to be lived."¹¹² The paraenetic mode of instruction in Colossians presupposes an audience that already accepts the authority of the teacher-writer and the validity of his teachings, but has yet to put the principles of Christian faith into practice on a consistent basis. Like most students, they require assistance in overcoming difficulties, distractions, and false opinions, in recognizing the full meaning of their beliefs for their personal welfare.

Philosophic paraenesis, as we saw above, addresses this kind of situation not by relating extra information or controversial arguments, but especially by rousing the memory of the addressees as to what they already know and by guiding them in the daily process of applying this knowledge to concrete instances of decision-making. In a like manner, the author of Colossians calls upon the readers to reflect upon the significance of their past within the movement as it pertains to the current situation and to act in a manner that is consistent with their received theology. Their actions, then, should manifest and confirm their convictions. The means by which this task of remembrance and reappropriation is accomplished in the letter can be analyzed in terms of the four components of the neophyte's journey as outlined earlier in this chapter: (1) remembrance of what conversion had accomplished for the direction of one's life, principally one's moral life; (2) remembrance of the movement's fundamental teachings, creeds, conventions, and so forth, what novices had learned during and since conversion; (3) remembrance of the teachers who had facilitated conversion and provided instruction and leadership in accordance with the tenets of the school; (4) remembrance of one's experiences within the movement since conversion, and on the nature of one's philosophic growth.

I. To begin with, it is clear that the author of Colossians wants the readers to remember what conversion accomplished or should have accomplished for the direction and shape of their moral existence. From the standpoint of the author, the most important event in their lives and in the history of their church was the conversion of its individual members to the Christian faith. While the technical terminology of "turning" that is characteristic of the philosophies is not part

¹¹² Lars Hartman, "Baptism," *ABD* 1 (1992) 589.

of the writer's nomenclature,¹¹³ the idea conveyed by this metaphor – of a comprehensive intellectual, ethical, and spiritual reorientation – is to be found throughout the letter's appeal. What is perhaps the most telling image in this regard appears in 1.12-13: the readers were "rescued" by God "from the realm of darkness" and "transferred" to the kingdom of God's beloved son, where they share in the inheritance of the saints in heaven. This language, influenced probably by the Exodus story, implies a radical and divinely-empowered shift for the believer from one realm of reality to another, opposite one. The writer posits the previous mode of existence not only as an alien, harmful "power" (ἐξουσία, cf. 1.16, 2.15) but also as a force that was determinative for the way the readers once conducted themselves, the path they once followed (see 3.7 with περιπατεῖν). In this pitiful state they were "dead in trespasses" (2.13, cf. 3.5-7), estranged and distant from God on account of evil deeds and hostility "in the mind" against God (1.21). But through this transfer they died to and from (ἀπό) the elements of the world (2.20, cf. 3.3), they were raised from the dead (2.12, 3.1), and were made alive (2.13), in a state where they have forgiveness of sins (1.14, 2.13-14) and reconciliation with God (1.22). They acknowledge their new Lord, the new power in their lives, Jesus Christ (2.6-7, etc.). Subsequently, the Colossians are able to set their minds on what is above in heaven where God is (3.2), putting to death those earthly vices that had corrupted their lives before (3.5-8, cf. 2.11) and putting on Christ-like virtues appropriate to God's elect (3.12-14).

These images – images of transfer, of being rescued from one realm to another, of dying and being raised, of putting off the old person and putting on the new, of obeying a new and divine Lord – convey powerfully both the contrast between the Colossians' Christian and pre-Christian lives and the contrast between the moral standard they observe as a Christian community and that which is observable in the outside world. The challenge for the addressees now is to show themselves worthy of their newly-defined status (1.10), to maintain and habituate that status through everyday conduct. In the language of the author, this means remaining secure, steadfast, and unshifting in their faith, as well as in the hope held out by the gospel. This hope includes the expectation of an eschatological revelation by God of both those who are "inside" the movement, who are bound to their new life and their new Lord and hence saved, and those who

¹¹³ Colossians 1.13-14 has a very close parallel in Acts 26.18, which does in fact speak of "turning" (ἐπιστρέψαι).

are not, a final, divine affirmation of the boundaries created by conversion (1.22-23, 3.4, 6, cf. 4.5).

A crucial and distinctive element relevant to the elucidation of conversion in Colossians emerges insofar as in the setting of a Pauline church initiation unfolds in a ritual process, a process for which myth, sacred symbols, and specialized language play a critical role in personal transformation and in the appropriation of the new ethos promoted by the movement.¹¹⁴ Consequently, the nature of the paraenetic practice of bringing to mind conversion takes on in a Christian environment characteristics appropriate to and dependent upon this ritual process.¹¹⁵ In Colossae, as in all Christian communities of the time, baptism was interpreted as the central act of conversion, being associated with repentance and a new moral and social orientation. The comparison drawn in 2.11 between baptism and circumcision, the initiatory rite par excellence of Judaism, makes the function of the former in this capacity especially plain. In this regard, the experience as well as the discussion of conversion in Christianity approximated that of contemporaneous religious movements more than that of any of the Greco-Roman philosophic schools.¹¹⁶ Consequently, many of the concepts that inform the shape of the letter's paraenesis derive from the rite of baptism, and so are distinctively Christian in background and point of reference.¹¹⁷ At the same time, the author's objective in the application of these concepts bears resemblance to the practices of the Greco-Roman moralists. He wants to reclaim the neophytes' experience of conversion, to recall and actualize the commitment that it entails in such a manner that it becomes determinative for attitude and action, to demonstrate that the initial acceptance of Christ puts the whole of one's existence under obligation. Furthermore, even allowing for the distinctiveness of the images employed in this particularly Christian setting, we can observe that some of the author's motifs would have been intelligible within a broader ideational milieu. For instance, Hellenistic moralists, both Greek and Jewish, made use of clothing imagery comparable to what we find in Colossians, admonishing readers to take off vices and to put on in their place virtues.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ For discussion and bibliography see *NIDNTT* 1.143-161; *EDNT* 1.192-196.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Arnold van Gennep, *Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960) 65-115.

¹¹⁶ For a nuanced discussion regarding the mysteries see Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection*, 296 ff., 360 ff.; from a different vantage point, van Gennep, *Rites*, 88-96.

¹¹⁷ Meeks, "To Walk Worthily," 45-48. On "liturgical paraenesis" in a Christian setting see Quinn, "Paraenesis," 194-202.

¹¹⁸ Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 155, n. 68, with p. 238. For instance: Dio Chrysostom,

The baptismal ritual practiced by first-century Christians, in the opinion of most scholars, must have been accompanied by a significant amount of instruction in the fundamentals of existence in Christ. Perhaps this included a formal creed or confession of faith, together with poems or canticles celebrating Christ's cosmic exaltation.¹¹⁹ Appropriately, it seems that in the context of Christian paraenesis, the christological content and, in particular, the soteriological aspects of recalling conversion were especially prominent. Thus a paraenetic message imbued with baptismal symbolism, like that of Colossians, becomes in effect a commemorative act, an occasion for reflecting on what the faithful believe they have received from God in Christ. In the ritual of baptism, the Colossians had entered into a new relationship with Christ, one that continues to determine their status and destiny. Clearly they are to construe Christ as the foundational reference of both the rite itself and any theological reflection on the rite's significance. Thus the text's plea to recall Christian initiation means in effect to recall Christ, in whose name one is baptized. Yet the practice of recalling Christ does not entail simply preserving in the memory an image of him, but entails above all the habit of allowing this memory to forge one's thoughts and actions.¹²⁰ The Colossians are directed to remember their conversion and what it has accomplished. Paul reminds the readers how in baptism they were "buried" with Christ and raised from the dead with Christ. The divine initiative that made this transformation and new life possible directs their future as individuals and as a community. We might infer, then, that this anamnesis is meant to provide the plot, so to speak, for the story of the Colossians' lives, a topic to which we shall return.

In its explication of the readers' moral outlook, this component of paraenetic remembrance in Colossians that has to do with the rite of conversion takes on the broader theological and mythic matrix which the rite implies. When the letter-writer speaks of the transfer

Orationes 60.8; Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 4.20; Philo, *De Somniis* 1.224-225. Further, Pieter W. van der Horst, "Observations on a Pauline Expression," *NTS* 19 (1972-73) 181-187.

¹¹⁹ Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 150-157. On baptismal creeds, see the studies surveyed by Vernon H. Neufeld, *The Earliest Christian Confessions* (NTTS 5; Leiden: E.J. Brill; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963) 1-10 (cf. 62, 98-99, 144); Hans von Campenhausen, "Das Bekenntnis in Urchristentum," *ZNW* 63 (1972) 210-253; Everett Ferguson, ed., *Conversion, Catechumenate, and Baptism in the Early Church* (Studies in Early Christianity 11; New York, London: Garland, 1993) 244-292, 352-390.

¹²⁰ Dahl, *Jesus*, 19-20; Meeks, *Origins*, 92-96. Meeks ("The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity," *HR* 13 [1973-74] 182) notes the power of baptismal language in shaping the group's symbolic universe.

or the rebirth of the addressees, his assumption is that all this has been accomplished for the believer by God through Jesus Christ, God's son, the firstborn of all creation and the firstborn from the dead, to whom belongs the new "kingdom," the new order of existence for the faithful (1.13-15, 18, 20, 2.2-3, 9-10, 12-15, 3.1, 3, 4.11). Believers realize their transfer into this realm and the implications of this event for their lives inasmuch as they are incorporated into Christ beginning at baptism, they are being "filled in him" (2.10). The author assumes as crucial to the efficacy of this status the representative nature of what God has done in Christ: just as God raised and exalted Christ after his death and burial, so those who die and are buried in Christ know that they have been raised and that will share in new life and glory. Thus the author can inform the readers that their life is in fact Christ (3.4). Yet this life remains "hidden" for the moment insofar as believers do not yet completely participate in the fullness of being and divine δόξα that Christ possesses unseen in heaven, but await the unveiling of this glory at the eschaton. (With this we might compare the ideas expressed by both Seneca and Porphyry that the status and progress of the neophyte are "hidden," especially from the eyes of outsiders.) Believers orient themselves accordingly: Christ died so as to render them "holy and blameless and irreproachable" (1.22, cf. 1.28, 4.12). This formulation identifies their current standing as Christians, but simultaneously looks forward, especially to the future epiphany of their Lord, when they will be revealed with Christ in glory, presumably at the final judgment. As Christ's visible body on earth, the community must assume the attributes of Christ, which include not only virtues that reflect what God has accomplished for humanity through Christ, but also the fact that their lives, like Christ himself, the head, is hidden.¹²¹

II. A second area of remembrance which is vital to the paraenetic appeal of Colossians involves bringing to mind the actual teachings and traditions that the addressees had learned during or since their conversion. We can open discussion of this topic by observing that virtually every verse of the letter inherits something from the thought of the apostle Paul – for example, the image of the community as a body – even if the concepts, symbols, language, and so forth ultimately derive from other sources.¹²² At any rate, from a material

¹²¹ Lona, *Eschatologie*, 172-189.

¹²² For an overview of various theories as to origin of this image see Gosnell L.O.R. Yorke, *The Church as the Body of Christ in the Pauline Corpus: A Re-examination* (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1991) 1-15.

perspective the teaching of Paul must have been foundational for nearly every stage of the Colossians' instruction.¹²³ At the same time, though, the message of the letter appeals to moral traditions that do not appear to have stemmed directly from the apostle, and may not even be distinctively Christian in origin, even while the interpretation of these sources may be said to be Pauline or Paulinizing in nature.¹²⁴ In keeping with its paraenetic style, the contents of the epistle are (from the vantage point of the intended readers) both traditional and eclectic.

Given the fact that early Christians institutionalized conversion in the ritual act of baptism, it follows that many of the traditional materials employed in the letter reflect the particular ideas and aspects of the rite. As befits its exhortatory mode, the author of Colossians apparently wants to depict for the readers the contours of the initiated life by way of reminders of conversion and not by way of anything like a comprehensive description of the rite or the teachings associated with it. Nevertheless, it is quite likely that the author intends for the recipients to link the particular directives he has selected to accomplish this task with all the other instructions, symbols, stories, acts, and so forth that they may have learned or witnessed during the process of the initiation.¹²⁵ We should bear in mind, however, that it is impossible to determine the precise relationship of any of the materials which are embedded in the text with the rite of baptism or the institutions of Christian conversion. To claim that the language, imagery, or apparent presuppositions of a given passage in Colossians reflect the specific ideational context of baptism and are appropriate to that ritual context does not necessarily mean that the origin and function of the passage or its contents can be traced back to that particular *Sitz im Leben*. The passage may instead be expressive of a secondary level of theological assessment designed especially in conjunction with the mnemonic, interpretive, and exhortatory objectives of its present paraenetic and epistolary setting. "What one believes about Christian experience," writes A.J.M. Wedderburn, "should shape one's beliefs about, and performance of, the rite that marks its beginning just as many of the ideas associated with the rite may be appropriate in the description of Christians' lives."¹²⁶ In the

¹²³ Jean-Noël Aletti (*Saint Paul: Épître aux Colossiens* [Paris: J. Gabalda, 1993] 190) charts the themes of Colossians paralleled in the Pauline corpus.

¹²⁴ Merklein, "Paulinische Theologie," 422, 447.

¹²⁵ In this capacity the anamnesis of the text functions referentially, presupposing the total picture but resting content with a partial exposition.

¹²⁶ Wedderburn, *Theology*, 49-50.

experience of the early church, the practices of moral formation influenced the process of ritual, which in turn served as a source of critical reflection for these very practices. Wedderburn concludes that "to locate a particular image or motif exclusively in the setting of baptism may blind us to the interrelatedness of this rite and what preceded and followed it."¹²⁷

Identifying with certainty those specific passages of the letter that the intended readers would have recognized as reminders of baptismal teachings, or that actually preserve such materials, has proven to be an elusive undertaking in the history of scholarship. The fact that so little has been pieced together about the rite of baptism in first century Christianity only compounds the difficulties, as does the observation that Colossians as a whole appears to be informed to varying degrees by such baptismal reminders. Suffice it to say that for the form critic the task of separating tradition from redaction is a most intricate one.

Nevertheless, and following the results of previous studies, we may isolate at least a few passages in the epistle whose formulations seem to capitalize on baptismal images. The first to be discussed is 1.12-14. Here, the designation of Jesus as "the beloved son," the emphasis on transfer,¹²⁸ and the assurance of eschatological reward¹²⁹ and of redemption and the forgiveness of sins, all seem to be consistent with the baptismal idiom (cf. I Peter 1.3-5).¹³⁰ The promise of enlightenment in 1.12 also points to a conversion experience.¹³¹ The notion that these verses derive from a primitive baptismal liturgy, which extends all the way to 1.20, as argued forcefully by Ernst Käsemann and others, remains an unproved hypothesis.¹³² A more guarded theory suggests that 1.12-14 constitutes a literary unit shaped by the author of the letter, originally independent of the hymn in 1.15-20, consisting of various traditional materials associat-

¹²⁷ Wedderburn, *Theology*, 50.

¹²⁸ In addition to the commentaries see George E. Cannon, *The Use of Traditional Materials in Colossians* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1983) 17-19.

¹²⁹ Zeilinger (*Erstgeborene*, 143) suggests that the motif of deliverance in 1.13 implies an eschatological change of ages.

¹³⁰ The use of the aorist forms ἐπρόσβατο and μετέστησεν may point to baptism as a definite event of the past; see Lohse, *Colossians*, 38. On the baptismal motifs of 1.12-14 see the commentaries; cf. Reinhard Deichgräber, *Gottes hymnus und Christushymnus in der frühen Christenheit: Untersuchungen zu Form, Sprache und Stil der frühchristlichen Hymnen* (SUNT 5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967) 78-82.

¹³¹ See, e.g., Hebrews 6.4, 10.32; *Josephus et Aseneth* 8.9, 15.12; Justin, *Apologia* 1.61.12; Pokorny, *Colossians*, 53; Lohse, *Colossians*, 38-39.

¹³² Ernst Käsemann, "A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy," *Essays on New Testament Themes* (SBT 41; Naperville: Allenson, 1964) 149-168; Zeilinger, *Erstgeborene*, 38-44, 138-139.

ed with baptism and of a credal or confessional nature.¹³³ Whether some or all of these materials originated in the liturgy of the rite itself is impossible to say.¹³⁴

The second passage to consider is 2.12-15, whose christological affirmations also indicate that the author borrows from traditional liturgical materials which reflected on or were made to reflect on the meaning of baptism. In conjunction with this, verses 12 and 13a appear to be created out of standard baptismal motifs which were influential in the Pauline tradition of teaching, as comparison with Romans 6.4 suggests.¹³⁵ However, the pseudepigrapher critically manipulates these ideas in a novel fashion, at least judging from comparison with the extant sources (cf. Romans 4.24-25).¹³⁶ In order to ward off the adherents of the philosophy, whose doctrines apparently undermined and underreckoned the sufficiency of salvation in Jesus Christ, our author reinterprets and extends the soteriological significance of baptism and, therefore, of Christian existence itself, which begins with and is predicated upon the theological assertions connected with the rite.

To be sure, opinions vary widely as to the background of this passage. An extreme view, such as that of Gottfried Schille, argues that a single baptismal hymn underlies a major portion of 2.9-15.¹³⁷ But against this sort of thinking a fair number of scholars concur that at least verses 14 and 15, and probably also verse 13c (beginning with *χαρισάμενος*), borrow from traditional baptismal materials of a hymnic character.¹³⁸ The use of the participial style, the relatively high number of "rare" (that is, non-Colossians or non-Pauline) terms, the change in grammatical subject from the second-person plural to the third-person singular,¹³⁹ and the shift in the application of the au-

¹³³ Schweizer, *Colossians*, 46-49; Pokorny, *Colossians*, 51; Yates, *Colossians*, 10-13.

¹³⁴ The employment of the participial style, relative pronouns, and non-Pauline terms also indicates the possibility of a liturgical tradition behind these verses; see Lohse, *Colossians*, 32-33. The use of the first-person plural in 1.13-14 may point to the same conclusion (note, too, that there is a good textual basis for reading *ἡμᾶς* in 1.12; see Lohse, *Colossians*, 35, n. 19).

¹³⁵ Cf. Robert Schlارب, *Wir sind mit Christus begraben: Die Auslegung von Römer 6,1-11 im Frühchristentum bis Origenes* (BGBE 31; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1990) 228, 233-246, 250-252.

¹³⁶ Cf. Wegenast, *Verständnis der Tradition*, 80-83; I Peter 1.21; also above, p. 19.

¹³⁷ Gottfried Schille, *Frühchristliche Hymnen* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1962) 31-37.

¹³⁸ See esp. Burger, *Schöpfung*, 79-114, who also surveys earlier options; cf. Cannon, *Traditional Materials*, 37-38; Ralph P. Martin, "Reconciliation and Forgiveness in Colossians," *Reconciliation and Hope: New Testament Essays on Atonement and Eschatology Presented to L. L. Morris on his 60th Birthday* (ed. R. Banks; Exeter: Paternoster, 1974) 116-124.

¹³⁹ To be sure, the subject changes in v. 13b (with *συνεζωοποίησεν*), suggesting

thor's statements from the second-person plural to the first-person plural, all suggest that a seam of some sort occurs at verse 13c.¹⁴⁰ The balanced structure and sustained theme evident in the passage suggest that behind 2.13c-15 lies a single traditional composition (or a fragment of one) that celebrates the cosmic victory and redeeming acts of God in Christ. Determining the original *Sitz* of the unit presents some difficulties, though the possibility that it was in some manner connected with early Christian liturgy, and perhaps baptismal liturgy, should not be ruled out.¹⁴¹ We can state with greater certainty that in its present setting the writer wants the readers to interpret the passage's contents in light of their conversion and baptism, which is the focus of 2.10 ff.: Christ's triumph over the rulers and authorities, the cosmic powers promulgated by the philosophy, manifests itself in the forgiveness of sins and the abolition of δόγματα. This occurs in baptism, where the believer is incorporated into the body of Christ.¹⁴² The linchpin here seems to be evident in the two concepts in verse 13 of being made alive in Christ and of forgiveness, concepts which were generally associated with baptism in the tradition (cf. 1.13-14).

The arguments regarding baptism in 2.8-15 can be understood as foundational for the author insofar as they directly inform the construction of the warnings and entreaties that immediately follow in the letter. This is visible most precisely in the key introductory statements used in 2.16-3.17, all of which echo baptismal language: "If you died with Christ..." (2.20); "So, if you were raised with Christ..." (3.1); "So, put to death..." (3.5); "So, clothe yourselves..." (3.12).¹⁴³ These compositional signposts indicate for this (rather major) seg-

something of a seam, but this line seems to represent the author's own special interests (cf. 2.12, 3.1) and may have been penned as a transition to the traditional source(s) which are "cited" beginning at v. 13c. Note, too, that the ὑμᾶς of v. 13b links up better with what precedes than with what follows.

¹⁴⁰ Another argument sometimes advanced for the traditional origin of vv. 14-15 is the perceived tension with 1.15-20 over whether the cosmic powers have been reconciled with God or have been defeated by God (ideas which are not necessarily incompatible); see Pokorny, *Colossians*, 142.

¹⁴¹ Klaus Wengst, *Christologische Formeln und Lieder des Urchristentums* (2nd ed.; SNT 7; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1972) 186-194; cf., besides Schille, Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Briefe an die Philipper, an die Kolosser und an Philemon* (KEK 9; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964) 100-102.

¹⁴² Besides the author's use of traditional material in 2.14-15, there is some agreement among critics that a redaction of this received material is discernible at v. 14, where the phrase τοῖς δόγμασιν ὃ ἦν ὑπεραντίον ἡμῖν seems to be a tautologous pendant inserted somewhat awkwardly in order to clarify the sense in which the writer wants the term τὸ χειρόγραφον to be interpreted within the polemical context of Colossians 2.8-23 (cf. δογματίζεσθε in 2.20).

¹⁴³ Note in the ordering of these key introductory formulae the alteration of negative and positive statements, a manner of construction that informs the shape of the

ment of the document an internal structure driven by the author's interpretation of baptism for the readers' existence (framed both positively and negatively) under the specific circumstances indicated in 2.4, 8, etc.¹⁴⁴

This leads to discussion of our third passage, 3.5-15, which is seemingly replete with the concepts and imagery of baptism, though it is improbable that the author borrows at this point from any pre-existing sources, as in 2.13c-15. The unit, rather, appears to be participating in some more wide-ranging traditions associated with conversion.¹⁴⁵ For instance, the motifs of "stripping off" and "putting on" in all likelihood were intended to evoke the ritual practices of nude baptism.¹⁴⁶ These sorts of images sharpen the contrast between the new way of life and the old, which is rejected (3.6-7). Also the author's manner of depicting the new self with which the recipients must clothe themselves takes on traditional characteristics allied with baptismal instruction. This would include the use of virtue and vice lists, which play a prominent role in this passage. It is safe to assume, as numerous studies have shown, that the original readers of Colossians would have been exposed previously to such formulations for governing conduct, potentially in non-Christian as well as in Christian settings.¹⁴⁷ But while the sorts of structures we find in 3.5, 8, and 12 would have been quite conventional, the actual virtues and vices listed by the writer have been chosen to point by way of reminder to Christian guidance given in a concrete setting, namely, the obligations imposed on initiates at baptism. This is evident especially in the concentration of the lists on two sets of moral issues, one having to do with purity, the other with unity.

To begin with the former, Romans 6.15-23 indicates how in the setting of Pauline theology instruction about the meaning of conversion and baptism could dovetail with efforts to promote the ideals of purity and sanctification, which were to characterize both the baptizand and the community as a whole. The rite of baptism, like all cultic acts, intends a separation of the pure from the impure and, by metaphorical implication, the moral from the immoral. Thus bap-

letter more generally. Also the οὖν of 2.16 suggests a direct connection of 2.16-19 with the baptismal affirmations that precede; by means of this conjunction the writer links a series of admonitions to the readers who share in the triumph of Christ through baptism: 2.16, 3.1, 3.5, 3.12; see Cannon, *Traditional Materials*, 71.

¹⁴⁴ On the composition of this section of the epistle see below, pp. 242-250.

¹⁴⁵ The extensive parallels that the passage demonstrates with I Thessalonians 4.1-11 and I Peter 3.21-4.11 are one indication of its traditional character.

¹⁴⁶ Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Garments of Shame," *HR* 5 (1966) 218-233; Meeks, "Androgyne," 183.

¹⁴⁷ See above, pp. 44-45.

tism can be explained as a ritualized exercise in drawing boundaries and in specifying the special marks of the initiated.¹⁴⁸ This sort of exercise can be cast in the form of an appeal to maintain those boundaries and that distinctiveness, as evidenced by Romans 6.19: "just as you once presented your members (μέλη, cf. Colossians 3.5) as slaves to impurity (ἀκαθαρσία, cf. Colossians 3.5)...now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification" (ἀγιασμός, cf. ἅγιοι in Colossians 3.12). In a manner consistent with the Jewish heritage of early Christian paraenesis, purity in a Pauline context is spelled out in terms of sexual morality – members who are holy must abstain from any act on account of which they might defile themselves or violate the rights of others in the community, conceived of as a body.¹⁴⁹ Among these vices the author specifies fornication, covetousness, passion, and evil desire (3.5). This concern for sexual purity in the lists of Colossians (as in other Christian catalogues) distinguishes them from their Greco-Roman counterparts and denotes an approximation to Jewish moral sensibilities.¹⁵⁰ In this regard Colossians parallels certain Hellenistic-Jewish exhortations, most of which are based on the Decalogue¹⁵¹ and on Leviticus 18-19, part of the so-called Holiness Code.¹⁵²

The commands of the Holiness Code also stress the theme of unity within the community of God's chosen people, a second main area of concern for Colossians 3.5-15 (cf., for example, Leviticus 19.11-18). Both Leviticus and Colossians emphasize the need for love and peace in the community, and include injunctions especially against "sins of the tongue," like lying, abusive language, and slander.¹⁵³ Yet the author of Colossians goes further than what is found in Leviticus or comparable codes of the Second Temple period, linking his moral

¹⁴⁸ Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 153; cf. van Gennepe, *Rites*, 65-115.

¹⁴⁹ Countryman (*Dirt*, 109) clarifies the linkage here (in Pauline fashion) of language relating to sexual purity with the condemnation of the vices of greed and idolatry.

¹⁵⁰ Besides the commentaries see Schrage, *Einzelgebote*, 187-210. Comparable Jewish lists could also be employed in conjunction with talk about the effects of conversion, e.g., Philo, *De Virtutibus* 180-183.

¹⁵¹ On the function of the Decalogue in Colossians 3 see Lars Hartman, "Code and Context: A Few Reflections on the Parenthesis of Col 3:6-4:1," *Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament: Essays in Honor of E. Earle Ellis* (ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Otto Betz; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1987) 237-247; Gnlika, *Kolossierbrief*, 185.

¹⁵² David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (New York: Arno, 1956, 1973) 106-140; Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, *Gesetz und Paränese: Katechismusartige Weisungsreihen in der frühjüdischen Literatur* (WUNT 2.28; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1987) 5 ff.; Wilson, *Mysteries*, 5-6, 63-74.

¹⁵³ Cf. Luke Timothy Johnson, "The Use of Leviticus 19 in the Letter of James," *JBL* 101 (1982) 391-401.

advice with an eschatological concept associated with baptism, the expectation of a new humanity in Christ, the culmination of God's plan for human fulfillment.¹⁵⁴ The background of the author's thought in this regard surfaces particularly in 3.11-12a, which parallels the baptismal formula of Galatians 3.27-28.¹⁵⁵ Also, references to the old and the new person in Colossians 3.9-10 may hark back to the Adam-Christ typology operative in Pauline theology, for example in Romans 5.12 ff., which in that context is also linked to baptism.¹⁵⁶ The flow of thought here and throughout Colossians 3.5 ff. revolves around the idea of God's creation of a new "self" that is being revived in knowledge according to the image of its creator (3.10) – and this image is Christ (1.15).¹⁵⁷ This new creation transcends the ordinary divisions in humanity to unify the faithful in the body of Christ, the church (3.11, cf. 1.17-18). Commentators note that here the author transfers classic, biblical designations of God's people to the gentile addressees (especially in 3.12), developing for them the self-identity of a new covenantal congregation.¹⁵⁸ They should count themselves as part of this covenantal relationship and comport themselves in a manner that is worthy of these designations. This is made possible for the faithful in baptism, through which a fallen humanity is incorporated into the risen Lord of the universe, bringing to an end the opposed sets of roles that disjoined its previous existence (cf. I Corinthians 12.13). Insofar as the image of the creator constitutes the standard and the force behind renewal (cf. Genesis 1.26-27), baptism suggested to the Christian mind a restoration of mythic ideals for humanity associated with paradise and the original creation (cf. Colossians 1.15-16). The primal unity, image, and glory that humankind had lost are restored in Christ, as God's plan of salvation through creation comes, as it were, full circle.¹⁵⁹ The outworking of this new humanity assumes an earthly and concretely social dimension insofar as the Christian community called by God and living as the body of Christ is precisely the realm in which are realized the

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Jervell, *Imago Dei*, 231-256.

¹⁵⁵ Besides the commentaries see Zeilinger, *Erstgeborene*, 157-160.

¹⁵⁶ Cannon, *Traditional Materials*, 72; Zeilinger, *Erstgeborene*, 151-157, 197-198; Gnlika, *Kolossierbrief*, 186; Barth, *Colossians*, 412.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Friedrich-Wilhelm Eltester, *Eikon im Neuen Testament* (BZNW 23; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1958) 156-164.

¹⁵⁸ In addition to the commentaries see James D. G. Dunn, "Anti-Semitism in the Deutero-Pauline Literature," *Anti-Semitism and Christianity: Issues of Polemic and Faith* (ed. Craig A. Evans and Donald A. Hagner; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 154-156.

¹⁵⁹ Following Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 155; cf. idem, "Androgyne," 180-189.

conditions for overcoming the alienating forces of the human condition in its fallen state.¹⁶⁰

As the perusal of any commentary will reveal, the discussion so far only grazes the surface of the potential application of pre-existing materials and ideas in Colossians. In fact, the message of the letter appeals to traditions of Christian and non-Christian instruction throughout, though the exact connection of these traditions with the rite of baptism and the formation of initiates (if any) is far from clear. Nevertheless, the extensive use of such materials adds substantially to the traditional and eclectic properties of the text, as well as to the author's apparent emphasis on the recipients' remembrance of previously-learned teachings as a means of addressing the current question of moral decision-making. For this reason it is worthwhile to survey some of these items, if only briefly. Four in particular deserve mention:

(a) Commentators on Colossians are in long-standing agreement that in 1.15-20 the author cites received material of a hymnic nature.¹⁶¹ Most likely, he assumed that this material, or at least the substance of it, was familiar to the addressees and had played some formal part in their prior Christian life, perhaps in a liturgical context, though there is no way of demonstrating this. The ultimate provenance of the hymn's theological assertions (principally in verses 15-18a), including perhaps even some of its actual statements, was in Hellenistic Jewish speculation about the divine *logos* or *sophia*.¹⁶² Later, Hellenistic Jewish Christians may have taken over and expanded these affirmations (especially in verses 18b-20), giving them hymnic form and applying them to Christ as a savior figure. Finally, the author of Colossians made some editorial expansions by way of an interpretation suited to his special purposes in writing. Regarding these additions, there appears to be a consensus that at least the following phrases should be included: "whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities" (verse 16d-e), "the church" (verse 18a), and "through the blood of his cross" (verse 20b). The author's purpose in appealing to a previously known hymn that applied to Christ mythological attributes connected with Jewish *sophia* may

¹⁶⁰ Pokorny, *Colossians*, 168.

¹⁶¹ In addition to the commentaries see Fowl, *Story of Christ*, 103-121.

¹⁶² Jean-Noël Aletti, *Colossiens 1,15-20: Genre et Exégèse du Texte. Fonction de la Thématique Sapientielle* (AnBib 91; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1981) 141-182; cf. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Wisdom Mythology and the Christological Hymns of the New Testament," *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity* (ed. Robert L. Wilken; Notre Dame, London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975) 17-41.

have involved an attempt to counter oppositional notions of divine wisdom predicated upon Torah observance of some kind or upon esoteric knowledge revealed through mystical experiences associated with quasi-divine powers, and not with Christ and the church.

(b) There is agreement that the *Haustafel* of 3.18-4.1, at least as concerns its basic structure and content, represents traditional material and is not original with the writer of our letter.¹⁶³ Such common formulations reflected widely endorsed social standards regarding the responsibilities among and between members of the household, especially insofar as they promote the ideal of an industrious, decorous, and orderly life.¹⁶⁴ The extent to which early Christians like our author may have altered these formulations is unclear, especially because the New Testament examples vary widely in their details. In contrast to both Greco-Roman and Jewish codes, though, we see here that the church, rather than the household, functions as the decisive social entity that establishes the structure of moral obligations within the community. One of the important implications of this teaching in Colossians 3.18 ff., however, is that the recipients' new found status in the church does not necessarily abrogate prior or pre-Christian social responsibilities. In this regard we may compare Colossians' advice with Porphyry's counsel to Marcella regarding her household duties (see above).

(c) The author makes use of a number of gnomic formulations that have a traditional, proverbial ring to them. On account of the universal quality evident in the moral concepts they contain and their general applicability to situations of life, maxims like those in 3.9a, 4.2a, 5, and 6 would probably be compatible with the folk wisdom of virtually any society.¹⁶⁵

(d) The author of Colossians is also in conversation with the principal source of moral insight and warrant for early Christianity, the Jewish scriptures, though to a less explicit extent than most of his fellow New Testament writers. It is fair to surmise that the job of introducing neophytes to these materials must have constituted one of the fundamental aspects of initiation, and that initiates of both Jewish and pagan origin would have required ongoing instruction in Chris-

¹⁶³ For discussion see above, pp. 45-47.

¹⁶⁴ On the nature of the code's interaction with Greco-Roman cultural ideas see Lars Hartman, "Some Unorthodox Thoughts on the 'Household-Code' Form," *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism: Essays in Tribute to Howard Clark Kee* (ed. Jacob Neusner, et al.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 219-232.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Petr Pokorný, "Griechische Sprichwörter im Neuen Testament," *Tradition und Translation: Zum Problem der interkulturellen Übersetzbarkeit religiöser Phänomene. Festschrift für Carsten Colpe zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Christoph Elsas, et al.; Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1994) 340-341 (on Colossians 2.17, 3.22).

tian practices of scriptural interpretation. In the paraenesis of the letter, the author on several occasions alludes clearly to scriptural passages, for instance, 2.22 (cf. Isaiah 29.13), 3.1 (cf. Psalm 110.1), and 3.10 (cf. Genesis 1.26-27). Additionally, in several more places the reader encounters specific themes or phrases that parallel those found in scripture, for example, 1.9 (cf. Exodus 31.3, Isaiah 11.2, Ben Sira 1.19), 2.3 (cf. Isaiah 45.3, Proverbs 2.3-4, Ben Sira 1.25), 2.16 (cf. Ezekiel 45.17, also Hosea 2.13, I Chronicles 23.31, II Chronicles 2.3, 31.3), 4.1 (cf. Leviticus 25.43, 53, Ben Sira 4.30, 33.30b-33), and 4.6 (cf. Exodus 30.35).

III. As for the third component of remembrance, we have already learned that moral philosophers often directed the neophytes under their supervision to remember the counselors who had facilitated their conversion and had offered them guidance within the movement since that time. The discussion in Chapter Two details how philosophers presented themselves according to generally accepted criteria of the ideal teacher-mentor and how the author of Colossians participated in some of these conventions in his depiction of the apostle. Recollection of the person, character, and actions of the teacher apparently assisted initiates in a number of ways. For instance, it helped to reinforce the memory of what the master had taught; it could offer students with a personal pattern to which to conform, or an edifying subject for meditation; and it could help to combat feelings of anxiety and isolation. Assistance of this sort seems to have been particularly needful when students were separated from their teachers or were confronting opposition to their movement. In a case of philosophic paraenesis such as Porphyry's *Ad Marcellam*, remembrance of the mentor could make him and his positive influence present to the reader even when he was far away or, conceivably, even after his death.

In Colossians, remembrance of the apostle connects the audience with the theology and mission of the Pauline movement, which was a central element of its Christian heritage. Although absent physically, he is present and working with the addressees in the spirit and via the letter itself. The extensive self-commendation of 1.24 ff. legitimates the apostle and his concern for them, describing his vocation, and holding forth Paul himself as an embodiment of what he teaches. The function of this aspect of recollection as a component of the epistle's moral and argumentative character is encapsulated vividly in its final verse, written in "Paul's" own hand: "remember my bonds" (4.18). Above all, the apostle is to be remembered as one who struggles courageously for others on behalf of the gospel, even against strong opposition and adversity. The author is concerned

also to draw into the circle of dedicated teachers to be remembered other members of the Pauline mission team, especially Epaphras. He, too, is physically absent, but Paul's testimony concerning this associate reminds the Colossians of the latter's hard work and his *ἄγων* on their behalf, especially in connection with their initial reception of the gospel.

IV. Another topic for remembrance in philosophic paraenesis and in Colossians entails the students' evaluation of their own progress since and in light of their initial commitment to the movement. This sort of recollection, as we learned, could take on both positive and negative aspects. On the positive front, the author of the epistle congratulates the readers on all they have accomplished in Christ up to this point. For instance, he has high praise for the faith, love, and hope they have demonstrated, all stemming from the gospel, which, he says, is bearing fruit among them (1.4-6). In the literary guise of Paul, the founder of their movement, the author affirms the good standing of the Colossian Christians as saints and the elect of God (1.1, 12, 22, 26, 3.12). This creates for the addressees a positive self-image as participants in the epistolary exchange, heightens their sense of responsibility, and encourages them to continue in the same way, living up to the apostolic accolades.¹⁶⁶

At the same time, the letter-writer identifies certain areas where progress on the part of the recipients still seems to be desired, indeed areas that require the immediate attention of the entire community. In some instances these concerns are indicated only indirectly, as in 1.9-10, part of a petitionary prayer. Here Paul asks that the readers be filled with the knowledge (*ἐπίγνωσις*) of God's will so that they may conduct themselves worthily of the Lord as they grow in the knowledge of God. The interesting progression of concepts that informs the author's train of thought (knowledge-conduct-knowledge) reveals some key aspects as to his understanding of knowledge in a Christian setting and of the readers' possession of this knowledge. The fact that the writer requests of God that the Colossians be filled with *ἐπίγνωσις* and that they continue to grow in it suggests that while they do in fact possess such knowledge (for example, 1.6) it is still deficient or (better) deficiently realized in some way.¹⁶⁷ The au-

¹⁶⁶ Cf. above, pp. 24-26.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Dahl, *Jesus*, 16: "...for the early Christians, knowledge was an anamnesis, a recollection of the *gnōsis* given to all those who have believed in the gospel, received baptism, and been incorporated into the church...Clearly, there always remains a possibility of growing in knowledge; but this essentially signifies an ever growing assimilation and an ever more perfect application of what has been once for all received."

thor indicates the nature of this deficiency through the linkage of growth in divine knowledge with the morally informed objective of conduct worthy of the Lord and of bearing fruit in every good work.¹⁶⁸ This idea anticipates the programmatic appeal of 2.6-7 and indeed occupies the lion's share of the letter's contents (2.6-4.6). In effect, the epistle argues for and demonstrates how growth and full knowledge are developed through moral conduct that is Christ-centered. This essentially defines true knowledge of God's mystery – both to know God's will and to do God's will as revealed in the Lord and as appropriated through the gospel's teachings. Reference to the concept of being "filled" implies how this knowledge impacts one's entire self.¹⁶⁹ As 3.10 underscores, in Christ the new humanity is being renewed to and for knowledge (εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν) in conformity with the image of the creator. This not only affirms God's involvement (through Christ, cf. 1.15) but indicates that this renewal is a dynamic and continuing action.¹⁷⁰ Because it originates with God the Father and creator, the demand of the gospel is comprehensive, laying claim to the total person in all situations and modes of life.¹⁷¹ The appeal for further or better knowledge, then, is not a summons to acquire more knowledge or further mysteries, or to probe the depths of esoteric or speculative wisdom, but to recognize in wisdom a demand to do God's will and to execute that demand in practical action.¹⁷²

This leads to the problem for us of identifying how the author of the epistle wants the readers to sustain their growth in the knowledge of God's will and in realizing that will concretely. For the letter-writer, the specifics of this growth and action revolve chiefly around the question of how the addressees are responding to the threat posed by the adherents of the Colossian philosophy and the special issues that this religious controversy engendered. This predicament was after all the main impetus for the composition of the letter. Nevertheless, several of the basic topics and criteria that

¹⁶⁸ Lohse (*Colossians*, 25-26) overstates the differences involved when he contends that the view of knowledge promoted here is influenced by Jewish presuppositions rather than Greek; this sort of discussion would have been fully intelligible in a Greco-Roman context (cf., e.g., Gnilka, *Kolossarbrief*, 40-41; Wilson, *Mysteries*, 113-116); though Lohse emphasizes correctly the importance for the author of knowledge in action (pp. 26-27).

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Colossians 1.9 ("in all wisdom"), 1.10 ("in every good work"), etc.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. below, p. 144, n. 41.

¹⁷¹ The evangelistic expansion of the church (Colossians 1.28, 2.19, 4.3-4) evidences an added social dimension in terms of growth in the Lord.

¹⁷² Pokorny, *Colossians*, 46-47: "the process of the progressive discovery of the encompassing grace of God (1.6) is related to the endeavor for a new life." Cf. Gnilka, *Kolossarbrief*, 40-41.

contribute to the letter's argument parallel those delineated by the Greco-Roman moralists with regard to the evaluation of moral progress, such as those summarized by Plutarch in his *De Profectibus in Virtute*.

Two areas identified by Plutarch in which progress should be sought by neophytes have already been mentioned in the treatment of Colossians. The first has to do with the importance for students of putting their convictions to work, of allowing belief to engage morality so that both might develop. The second concerns the extent to which neophytes are able to remember and emulate admirable individuals from the past, particularly those whose virtue was demonstrated in the endurance of hardship. As we have seen, the letter seems to make the case that the Colossians should measure their progress by the standard of how their behavior validates the teachings and example of the apostle.

Other topics discussed by Plutarch may also be applicable in understanding the function of Colossians as paraenesis. It is plain, to begin with, that our author wants the readers to maintain a strong degree of allegiance to and uniformity with their Christian calling (1.23, 2.5-7, 19). He also recognizes in connection with this the need for endurance and fortitude on their part as the community overcomes obstacles that might impede obedience – among these problems are the separation of the community from its teachers and the deceitful condemnations of an oppositional group. Thus Paul extols for the Colossians virtues such as ὑπομονή and μακροθυμία (1.11, 3.12, cf. 1.23, 2.5-7), drawing from architectural imagery to indicate the solid foundation in the faith that is expected of them (1.23, 2.7).¹⁷³ Contributing to his polemic, the author entreats the addressees to order themselves according to what is divine, spiritual, and true, and to reject whatever orders itself according to human, earthly standards of deceit, contentiousness, and vanity. The δόξα they should seek is not defined according to worldly status, but in accordance with the eschatological glory of God, which is hidden in Christ. In this sense, the moral orientation of the Christian can be said to be characterized by humility (ταπεινοφροσύνη) and meekness (πραΰτης), not to mention love, forgiveness, and compassion (3.12-14). This attitude is marked above all by thanksgiving: thankfulness to God formally affirms for the audience the presence for them of the unseen reality.

We also discern in the epistle the objective of encouraging and enabling the readers to perceive the difference between reality and

¹⁷³ On building metaphors in ancient exhortation cf. Mitchell, *Paul*, 99-111.

mere appearance in terms of their new worldview. To the human eye, God, Christ, and the apostle – as well as the Colossians' own hope, *δόξα*, fullness, and so forth – are not apparent or visible. Yet the reality is that these elements of the new life are present in heaven, perceivable spiritually, and working powerfully in the personalities of the readers.¹⁷⁴ The author reminds them of how God reveals what is hidden, specifically through Christ and the apostolic proclamation of the gospel of Christ, the divine mystery that had been hidden for ages (1.26, 2.2, 4.3-4). The letter-writer also underscores the significance for Christian existence of what is in the heart as, for example, in 2.2, 3.15-16, 22, 4.8. Opposite this are the hypocrisy and vanity of the philosophy (2.4, 8), which is predicated upon misguided visions that have nothing to do with Christ (2.18-19). The opponents' religious program has the appearance or reputation (literally, the "name") of wisdom (2.23), but, despite its claims, it possesses no real value, being only a shadow of the things that were to come, while the substance, the reality, belongs to Christ (2.17). The formulation of 2.17 in particular (cf. 3.1-4) gives the antithesis between appearance and reality in the author's thinking a clear historical and eschatological edge. The Christ-event has altered the course of reality, ushering in a new age that overturns the old. At the culmination of the age, the hidden realities of God in Christ, those realities that are determinative for the "hidden" lives of the readers now, will be revealed in all their divine splendor.

¹⁷⁴ E.g., Colossians 1.5, 15, 16, 2.1, 3, 5, 9, 3.2-3; the motif of the readers' being dead and buried with Christ could also be included here, e.g., 2.12-13.

CHAPTER FOUR

OTHER PATTERNS, OTHER VOICES

In Chapters Two and Three we analyzed those elements of the epistolary exchange and paraenetic appeal involved with the letter to the Colossians that are referred to in the first-person (the presumed writer, Paul) and in the second-person (the recipients, purportedly the Christian communities in Colossae). The purpose of this chapter is to investigate what we may call the major third-person characters of this exchange, characters who are mentioned in the letter frequently and whose actions are of importance for appreciating the situation being confronted by the letter-writer and the readers. As we will see in Chapter Five, it is essential that we take into consideration the roles of these third-person characters since they are vital to the letter-writer's delineation of worldview and, consequently, to the characterization of his moral exhortation and the motivation provided to actualize it.

For the sake of analysis, the third-person characters can be divided into two groups, those associated with the author's conception of divinity (that is, God and Christ), on one hand, and the author's adversaries, on the other. The discussion below will suggest that both of these sorts of categories for third-person characters figure prominently also in the construction of ancient philosophic paraenesis, a feature that sheds some light on both the decidedly religious and the fundamentally dialectical nature of this mode of communication. In the comparative literature as well as in Colossians, we see that the clash of opposing symbols and perspectives is basic to the articulation of worldview, and that these symbols and perspectives belong to both the human and the divine realms of existence. This fact regarding worldview necessitates on the part of paraenetic writers the application of religious definitions and moral boundaries; indeed it is often in the context of contention and debate regarding a worldview or specific perceived anomalies in a worldview that its acknowledged qualities come into relief most clearly. This fact necessitates also for the audience an informed alignment with one explanation of reality as opposed to another and a decision as to how the anomalies of the new symbolic realm are to be reconciled in practical terms. In a paraenetic setting, references to elements of a presupposed symbolic universe are not carried out in a neutral, academic manner, but are

put forth always with a view to the normative quality that the symbolic universe can have for personal formation and moral commitment.

The Theology of Paraenetic Discourse

Virtually every example of moral exhortation in a philosophic milieu includes at least some reference or preunderstanding regarding divinity. Indeed, given the basic social functions for their genre as discussed in Chapter Three, it seems that paraenetic guides could hardly do otherwise and still be effective. In any paraenetic text, theological presuppositions ground the complex of ideas and warrants that the author promotes as an aid to the readers' consolidation of their new worldview, with its new interpretations of human identity and purpose.¹ Insofar as the starting point and primary criterion for shaping such a worldview consist of distinctively formulated explanations of the nature of divinity, of the divinely-sanctioned order of the cosmos, and of the most appropriate forms of religious life, philosophic initiates were compelled to separate themselves from previous theological beliefs and practices and take on new ones.²

Examined from the perspective of worldview, then, it would be fair to say that all ideas regarding moral agency in a paraenetic context relate, at least at the presuppositional level, to theological assumptions.³ Of course, none of the paraenetic texts that we have been examining could be confused with a treatise on systematic theology. In keeping with the style of this literature, a paraenetic author

¹ Iamblichus, *De Vita Pythagorica* 28.137: "All...injunctions which define what is to be done or what is not to be done are directed at concordance with the divine, and this is a first principle, and their whole way of life is arranged for following the deity, and this is the rationale of their philosophy." On the (thoroughly) religious nature of the philosophic quest see Rutherford, *Meditations*, 178 ff., 225 ff., with references.

² That a person's identity and behavior are determined and focused by his or her theology is evidenced quite plainly, for instance, in the *Carmen Aureum*, which integrates moral precepts relating to the practice of virtue and self-evaluation (esp. vv. 1-49a) with instruction on divinity, human spirituality, metaphysics, and eschatology (esp. vv. 49b-71); see Thom, *Golden Verses*, 59-68, 82-92, and passim; on the *Carmen Aureum* as paraenesis: pp. 33, 43; on the *Carmen Aureum* as psychagogy: pp. 77-81.

³ The essential relation between religious assumptions and moral values in the philosophic curriculum is illustrated by *Epistulae Morales* 90.3, where Seneca argues that philosophy's function "is to discover the truth about things divine and things human. From her side religion never departs, nor duty, nor justice, nor any of the whole company of virtues...Philosophy has taught us to worship that which is divine, to love that which is human; she has told us that with the gods lies dominion, and among men, fellowship." This theological character of philosophy is consistent with Seneca's conviction that it is a gift bestowed by the gods (90.2). Cf. Philo, *De Congressu Eruditionis Causa* 79-80.

will simply remind the readers of specific elements of the belief-system that they have already accepted as members of their movement, selecting those that are most pertinent to the problem at hand. This is ordinarily undertaken by way of shorthand references to particular teachings, symbols, events, and formulae associated with the neophytes' previous learning and experience. The goal of this sort of theological anamnesis and dialogue is to construct a morally-guided and situation-specific appeal for the readers to act in a manner that is consistent with their beliefs, to mature spiritually.

Since the majority of philosophic thinkers maintained that their individual theologies were founded upon widely endorsed perceptions of divinity, their formulations concerning the gods routinely presuppose and are integrated with ideas borrowed from the prevailing culture, though in a discriminating fashion.⁴ As we learned earlier, paraenetic texts ordinarily take into view cultural assumptions which are broader in their frame of reference than those associated with the particular ideology of the text itself. Consequently, paraenetic constructions that allude to the divine can assume various points of reference. This can make it difficult to abstract the particular theological principles at work in a given text. For example, the theological perspectives of most Hellenistic philosophers reveal some sort of friction between polytheistic and monotheistic tendencies of conceptuality. Often this disparity evidences the more basic tension in Greco-Roman philosophy between respect for and interest in popular religious traditions (such as those concerning the Olympic pantheon or Delphic piety) and the religious skepticism harbored generally by the philosophers themselves.⁵ Many thinkers assume the existence of θεός or *deus*, which essentially identifies for them everything encompassed by the designation "divine" or which is intended to differentiate a supreme god or divine principle from lesser divinities and spiritual forces. As an intentional account of divinity, then, Greco-Roman monotheism was not exclusive of divine plurality, as it would be for modern explanations of the concept, but could potentially include a vast hierarchy of beings and modes of existence. This tendency complicates the picture of divinity in the philosophic traditions of moral exhortation considerably, especially since little need was felt to delineate the contours of this picture systematically.

However, although the place of "god" in paraenetic appeals can vary widely in terms of the nature of the author's interaction with

⁴ A. A. Long, "Epicureans and Stoics," in Armstrong, *Spirituality*, 137.

⁵ John P. Kenney, "Monotheistic and Polytheistic Elements in Classical Mediterranean Spirituality," in Armstrong, *Spirituality*, 269-292.

popular beliefs or in terms of the level of explicitness in the presentation, some of the basic themes of this discussion can still be anticipated. For instance, paraenetic authors sometimes divulge how the responsibilities they recommend accord with the divine will or with the divinely-instituted order of reality. They may also ascribe the basis of their ethics to special insight pertaining to the divine. This could entail as well the claim that the moral course encouraged by the writer is in some fashion informed by an understanding of or access to spiritual power. In still other cases, the paraenetic author may draw upon the divine for models of the moral life for readers to learn from. This all coincides with the overriding aim of philosophic instructors to outline for their pupils the most authentic and enlightened form of piety possible. A few examples will illustrate some of the different ways that this discussion could proceed.

The first illustration, the philosophic letter of Epicurus to his pupil Menoeceus, might seem to be an odd place to begin our survey.⁶ This is because, in the opinion of Epicurean theology, while the gods do exist and appear to possess human form, they are not present in the visible world and have no part in its organization or (for that matter) in mortal affairs. Nevertheless, the gauge of all Epicurean teachings, including especially ethics, is a correct opinion regarding the nature of the divine.⁷ Epicurus' theological propositions, by and large, concentrate on freeing the soul from pain, anxiety, and perplexity, conditions that unnecessarily disturb the vast majority of people. For him, the chief ailments afflicting humankind consist of misplaced fears about the gods and about the natural processes, especially regarding death and the hereafter. This sort of apprehension engenders mistaken convictions as to the true sources of human happiness and the nature of human existence, which in turn breed harmful ambitions, impiety, and vice.⁸

With this in mind, it comes as no surprise that Epicurus begins by reminding Menoeceus of two fundamental religious tenets of his ideology, which are viewed as both preconditions and aspects of the moral instruction imparted in the main corpus of the text.⁹ He starts by insisting on the immortal and blessed nature of the gods, who

⁶ Although addressed to Menoeceus, the epistle seems to have in view a fairly wide readership, consisting mostly of philosophic novices; see Cyril Bailey, *Epicurus: The Extant Remains* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1926) 327-328, with text and translation of the letter on pp. 82-93.

⁷ For an overview of this topic see DeWitt, *Epicurus*, 249-288.

⁸ On this theme see the short but informative treatment by David Konstan, *Some Aspects of Epicurean Psychology* (Philosophia Antiqua 25; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973).

⁹ Here and throughout the text, the master draws from the traditional Epicurean τετραφάρμακος, for which see *Kyriai Doxai* 1-4; cf. Bailey, *Epicurus*, 346-351.

enjoy a painless existence of sublime detachment (ἀταραξία). Because the gods are not engaged actively in human affairs, they do nothing to injure us, but rather it is people, misled by false beliefs, who endow the images of the gods with power to harm them, either in this life or the next.¹⁰ Epicurus then refers to the basic concept that death is to be regarded as neither good nor bad, but simply as the end of existence and the cessation of consciousness and sensation. Again, he refutes erroneous judgments held by the general public, for example, that death can be a cause of pain or a release from pain, or that there will be some sort of post-mortem spiritual life or encounter with the divine. Proper theological doctrines, then, free one to worship the gods properly, without fear or superstition.¹¹

Citation of these religious principles sets the stage for the ensuing exhortations, which are selected and organized in the nature of a summary of Epicurean ethics.¹² In comparison with his other extant writings, the sage tends to draw moral conclusions here along more traditional and less strictly Epicurean lines, in a fashion consistent with the letter's paraenetic properties. The goal of philosophy, simply put, is to achieve a manner of existence and purpose that is as much like that of the gods as possible, to have a share of the gods' ἀταραξία and happiness, to be godlike (§ 135). In the Epicurean worldview, the gods operate principally as models of tranquillity, beatitude, and friendship.¹³ The beginning, end, and standard of self-realization have to do with pleasure (ἡδονή), understood as the absence of anxiety and pain. A state of blessedness is to be had by choosing wisely as to the satisfaction of one's pleasures. Although one should consistently judge pleasure to be a good, discrimination on the part of the moral agent is required, since some pleasures must be avoided owing to their concomitant pain, while some pains will be accepted on account of the pleasure that arises out of them. In this regard Epicurus presents the virtues of αὐτάρκεια ("self-sufficiency") and φρόνησις ("practical insight") as integral to the pleasant life. The former enables one to be content with as little as possible, making a life of pleasure easier to accomplish, while the latter directs the moral agent to correct judgments.¹⁴

¹⁰ Cf. Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* 6.68-79.

¹¹ On the relation of Epicurean theology to "official" forms of worship see André-Jean Festugière, *Epicurus and his Gods* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955) 51-72.

¹² Cf. Wilson, *Mysteries*, 184-196.

¹³ Long, "Epicureans and Stoics," 144-145; Frischer, *Sculpted Word*, 77-79.

¹⁴ Cf. Benjamin Farrington, *The Faith of Epicurus* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967) 123-124; Phillip Mitsis, *Epicurus' Ethical Theory: The Pleasures of Invulnerability* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1988) 117-127.

Our second example comes from Epictetus' *Diatribae* 1.6. This author, like all Stoics, postulates the existence of a supreme god (often called Zeus) who is responsible for providence and creative agency. God's immanence throughout all nature is taken for granted, as is a divine interest in human welfare.¹⁵ According to the Stoic explanation of reality, the universe – as a whole and in its individual parts – exhibits a rational order that gives evidence of its divine principle. Insofar as humankind is an offshoot and partner of god, it is endowed with the special gift of reason, which is the essence of god. People are designed in such a way that harmony with god and the rational order of reality identifies their supreme function in life. Thus the goal of imitating god, of being like god, of aligning oneself with the moral order and divine purpose perceptible in the cosmos is essential to one's well-being.¹⁶

These Stoic principles pertaining to the theological basis of morality inform Epictetus' particular course of instruction in 1.6, a paraenetic speech that takes on the themes of courage and independence. He begins with the observation that every object and occurrence in the physical world reveals god's involvement, from the rising of the sun to the flowering of plants. In all this, divine intelligence, order, and care is evident; god therefore is present in his works (§ 24). While god has supplied the power (*δύναμις*) to see, to eat, to procreate, and so forth to all creatures, human beings exclusively have been equipped with the special faculty of understanding, *παράκολουθητική* (§ 15). Suited with their intellect (*διάνοια*), human beings, in order to recognize their true *telos* in life, must perceive who they are and for what they have been created. People were brought into existence in order to observe, contemplate, and interpret rationally the world around them, and to behave in conformity with their god-given faculties. Because Zeus has endowed us with these faculties free from restraint or compulsion, they are entirely our own, and as moral agents we exercise the authority to act unhindered (§ 40).

Epictetus deduces from this theological and anthropological reflection a specific appeal to his students regarding their moral responsibility, especially their need to bear up under the pressure and distress connected with the pursuit of philosophy. He notes that in particular Zeus has furnished people with magnanimity, courage,

¹⁵ Long, "Epicureans and Stoics," 145-151; Myrto Dragona-Monachou, *The Stoic Arguments for the Existence and the Providence of the Gods* (Athens: National and Capodistrian University of Athens, 1976) 177-208.

¹⁶ As Epictetus puts it in *Diatribae* 2.8.9-14, since all people are created by god and have a portion of god within them, they bear god about with them, and whatever they do for and to themselves they do for and to god; cf. 1.9.4-9, 1.12.1-16.

and perseverance (§§ 28-29).¹⁷ It belongs to one's rational purpose to make the most of these virtues, to overcome fear, doubt, and the obstacles that may impede efforts to translate the divine will into action. Like Heracles, we must exercise and exploit our abilities, accepting whatever *περίστασις* Zeus determines, seizing upon it as an opportunity for demonstrating the superior nature of our divine gifts (§ 37).¹⁸ In this, one discovers not only the substance of true virtue but also the most appropriate expression of piety, as one praises and gives thanks to god for providing all of life's needs (§§ 1-2, cf. 39).¹⁹

Our next illustration is the ninth epistle of Pseudo-Anacharsis, a hortatory letter composed perhaps in the third century BC.²⁰ In terms of its cultural vantage point (evident principally in its disdain for the social conventions of contemporary civilization), the document belongs to the ambit of Cynic philosophers and their teaching, though in fact it manifests a fairly eclectic and popular flavor, as befits its paraenetic style.²¹ The pseudepigrapher begins with a mythic account of the primeval distribution of cosmic authority (cf. Homer, *Iliad* 15.187-193). One of the sons of Chronos was assigned dominion in heaven, another son hegemony over the seas, and the third supremacy in Hades. The earth, though, and everything that it encompassed, was left as a common possession of all the gods. This tale furnishes religious presuppositions pertinent to the author's worldview and the text's argumentative objectives. The failure of human beings to recognize fully the moral consequences of this myth, in particular that worldly wealth must be shared, is interpreted by the letter-writer as the source of the vice and affliction that corrupt society. People have transgressed the divine order of the universe in their desires, deceiving themselves and failing to learn from the example of the gods.

According to this reading, the traditional story becomes the basis of a paraenetic appeal for the addressee (ostensibly Croesus) to as-

¹⁷ I.e., μεγαλοψυχία, ἀνδρεία, and καρτερία. Cf. Epictetus, *Diatribae* 2.16.14.

¹⁸ Cf. Abraham J. Malherbe, "Herakles," *RAC* 14 (1988) 560-563.

¹⁹ Cf. Epictetus, *Diatribae* 4.1.103-110.

²⁰ Franz H. Reuters, *Die Briefe des Anacharsis* (Schriften und Quellen der Alten Welt 14; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1963) 1-9, 18-23, 31-34; Malherbe, *Cynic Epistles*, 6-9, 46-51.

²¹ On the spirit of Cynicism for the early Hellenistic period see Donald R. Dudley, *A History of Cynicism: From Diogenes to the 6th Century* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1967) 17 ff., 59 ff.; scorning law and custom (νόμος), the Cynic pursues a life of freedom based on a humble and self-sufficient existence *κατὰ φύσιν*, for which see also Ragnar Höistad, *Cynic Hero and Cynic King: Studies in the Cynic Conception of Man* (Uppsala: Lund, 1948) 45-47, 100-105, 110-111, 127-128, 134-137, etc.

pire to wisdom rather than to hoard wealth and possessions.²² Greed is characterized as the cause of numerous moral "diseases," such as envy and falsehood, which are difficult to cure and lead ultimately to slavery and ruin. Anacharsis admonishes Croesus for his shortcomings in this regard, entreating him to renounce his bondage to licentiousness and to pursue instead a purified life of simple virtues. He calls on the king to be of good courage and to consider the lesson of a didactic parable concerning robbers and a grounded ship, as well as the example of the Scythians (Anacharsis' own kinfolk), who have achieved a peaceful and self-sufficient way of life, content with those gifts of the earth necessary for survival.²³

Our final example is the *Ad Marcellam*, discussed in Chapter Three. Like his fellow Neoplatonists, Porphyry considered the goal of philosophic training to be life according to the intellect. This entails turning in contemplation and with discipline to the νοῦς, which is the authentic and abiding self. Yet this νοῦς is not simply one's own intellect; it is at the same time the divine Intellect to which it is united. To be present to the self, to contemplate and be fully conscious of the true self, therefore, means to be present to the divine mind, or god, located at the level of true being. As Porphyry puts it, the intellect is both the mirror-image of god and the dwelling-place of god.²⁴ Thus philosophy busies itself with the ascent of the soul from the physical, irrational world of decay to god (6.99 ff.), the ascent into oneself (10.179 ff.), by which one achieves union with god (19.314-315) and attains godlike status (11.191 ff., 15.265 ff., 17.286-287, 32.493 ff.).

In this metaphysical scheme, θεός represents the entirety of the divine realm, the immortal and spiritual order of existence determined by pure reason and the Good. This order of existence includes a host of intermediary divine beings in addition to the One, the ultimate source and ground of being.²⁵ Thus god governs the universe

²² The text classifies itself as συμβουλή; on philosophic letters of advice see Stowers, *Letter-Writing*, 91-94, 107-112, 151.

²³ The description of the Scythians brings to mind typical reminiscences of a Golden Age, the sort of image with which the epistle began; cf. A.O. Lovejoy and G. Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1935) 117-152.

²⁴ Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 13.233-234, 21.333, cf. 19.318-319.

²⁵ Pierre Hadot, "Neoplatonist Spirituality: I. Plotinus and Porphyry," in Armstrong, *Spirituality*, 242: the Good, or the One, according to Neoplatonists like Plotinus and Porphyry, on account of its absoluteness and pure presence makes the existence of all things possible; thus it is the first principle and ontological source of reality, the ultimate source of power and life. It should be noted, though, that the letter includes no specific reference to the One such as we find in other Neoplatonic

(21.339 ff.) and beholds all human activity (11.205-209), though various angels and daemons also influence human welfare (21.342-344). It is the intellect of this superior, divine realm that empowers the intellect of the human self, illuminating it and permitting it to recognize its genuine nature and destiny.²⁶ God, then, can be thought of as the core of existence and the savior of humankind (5.75-77). In this regard, the intellect is the source of palpable personal power – power over the physical body, over the corrupting forces of the material world, and over evil daemons that seek to pervert the soul. These affirmations ground the moral recommendations that Porphyry issues to his spouse. The process that sustains human integrity is stated succinctly in 11.199 ff.: the individual who possesses right knowledge of the divine is empowered, cleansed, and inspired by god, and thus enabled to pursue righteous action (δικαιοπραγίαν). In the conduct of this person god is continually present as overseer of every deed and word (παντὸς ἔργου καὶ λόγου).²⁷ Furthermore, it is only through self-realization and union with the divine that appropriate worship of god is possible. The sage alone recognizes that it is necessary to pray to god only for those things that are worthy of god (τὰ ἄξια θεοῦ).²⁸ All other forms of piety, informed as they are by the standards of the material world, are self-serving and misguided (16.279-80, 22.348 ff.).²⁹

God, Christ, and the Moral Bearing of Colossians

Like the philosophic texts surveyed above, the epistle to the Colossians makes extensive reference to the divine as part of its paraenetic appeal. In addition, many of the same sorts of categories and motivations employed by the philosophers in referring to divinity are at work in our text, even while the content of its theology is determined by the author's Pauline heritage, which in turn is indebted to the worldview of contemporaneous apocalyptic Judaism. In examining the function of divinity as a third-person element in the

writings of the period, and in this regard the theological conceptualities of the *Ad Marcellam* seem to approximate more the divine hierarchy of the Middle Platonists; cf. Kenney, "Monotheistic and Polytheistic Elements," 284-287.

²⁶ Hadot, "Neoplatonist Spirituality," 234.

²⁷ Cf. Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 12.205-206, cf. 14.237-241, 15.259-260, 21.334-335.

²⁸ Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 12.209, cf. 15.263-265. On the place of prayer in psychagogy see Rabbow, *Seelenführung*, 338-340; H.D. Saffrey, "Neoplatonist Spirituality: II. From Iamblichus to Proclus and Damascius," in Armstrong, *Spirituality*, 255-256, 259; Rutherford, *Meditations*, 23, 39, 200-205; Newman, "Cotidie Meditare," 1481-1482.

²⁹ See below, pp. 164-165, 209-212.

epistle, we can conveniently divide the discussion into two parts, according to the two major figures that occupy the divine realm in Christian thought. In the first part, we examine the author's theology in the strict sense of the word, his presentation of θεός. In the second, we turn to the text's christology, its presentation of Jesus Christ, the image and Son of God, head of the universe and Lord of the church.

The function of God as a character in Colossians, in a manner consistent with biblical tradition, is expressed metaphorically by means of personal roles that demonstrate what God is and does.³⁰ The most prominent of these are God as creator, monarch, judge, and parent, roles which overlap to a considerable extent. First of all, God is the creator of all things in the universe, in both the visible and invisible realms of reality, a fact that manifests God's absolute power and glory.³¹ Thus God determines the constitution, order, and destiny of all things, and is the ultimate origin and sustainer of all life (1.15-16, 3.10). Second, and as a consequence of this, God is the supreme ruler of the universe. Like any monarch, God governs a realm. To be sure, this realm encompasses the entire cosmos, but the author identifies God's realm specifically and symbolically as "the kingdom of God" (4.11), that is, heaven, which is, like God, invisible, "above," and characterized by glory (1.12, etc.). This realm is unequalled and impregnable; consequently God overcomes all foes (1.18-20, 2.13-15).³² God's function as monarch overlaps naturally with the role of judge; in any realm the will of the ruler is the final arbiter of all affairs.³³ In the context of Pauline theology, the role of God as judge is shaped by beliefs concerning the eschatological denouement, when those who have obeyed God's command will be rewarded, while those who have failed to do so will incur God's wrath (1.22-23, 28, 3.4, 6, 4.12). This judgment represents the ultimate motivation, standard, and determiner of who is included among the elect of God and who is not. Consequently, any other standard of human worth or purpose, such as the δόγματα of the cosmic powers, is rendered insignificant and contrary to the divine

³⁰ Rudolf Hoppe, "Theologie in den Deuteropaulinen (Kolosser- und Epheserbrief)," *Monotheismus und Christologie: Zur Gottesfrage im hellenistischen Judentum und im Urchristentum* (ed. Hans-Josef Klauck; QD 138; Freiburg: Herder, 1992) 163-178; Meeks, *Origins*, 157-173; Pierrette T. Daviau, "Une Lecture des Figures de l'Acteur Dieu dans Colossiens," *LTP* 48 (1992) 7-18.

³¹ Power language is in fact integral to the author's thinking, e.g., 1.11, 29, 2.12, 19.

³² Like any monarch God has many servants; in Colossians, those individuals who carry out God's will can be identified as "slaves" of God: 1.7, 4.7, 12.

³³ God's will (θέλημα): 1.1, 9, 4.12, cf. 1.19, 25, 27, 2.2, 12, 19, 3.6, 12, 4.3-4.

will.³⁴ As the consummate judge, God's actions facilitate the ultimate good for creation, embodying in perfect form wisdom, justice, and mercy. This is evidenced especially in the redemption and reconciliation experienced by those who are in Christ (1.12-14, 22, cf. 2.13, 3.13). This leads to the fourth role, God as parent. Through the process of death and rebirth in Christ, baptism creates a new family whose *πατήρ* is God (1.2, 3, 12, 3.17). As God's children, the faithful recognize in God's actions towards them love and forgiveness.³⁵ In Christ they experience power and growth from God (1.11, 2.19).

As essential as the role of God is for the author's symbolic universe, it is clearly the figure of Christ and God's activity through Christ that constitute the heart and driving force of the letter's theological thinking and the theological basis of its ideas regarding personal formation. Christ, or Messiah, was a Jewish designation in antiquity for the eschatological ruler and redeemer of Israel. In Colossians, as throughout the Pauline corpus, it is taken as a proper name for Jesus, who enjoys a unique relationship to God as God's "beloved son" (1.3, 13).

The chief source for the author's christology is the famous hymn of 1.15-20, which, as we learned in Chapter Three, has been borrowed from the (most likely Jewish-Christian) tradition and quoted with only minor, though significant modifications.³⁶ The hymn's chief goal relates to assertions about Christ's capacity as the ultimate revelation of God, the comprehensive nature of Christ's hegemony in the cosmos, and the total sufficiency of God's saving power as manifest in Christ. The hymn develops these assertions mythically, speaking of Christ as a preexistent divine being and analogically applying to Christ concepts originally associated in Hellenistic-Jewish theology with divine *sophia* or *logos*.³⁷ The hymn qualifies and extends these sapiential concepts particularly through statements regarding Christ's function in God's new, eschatological creation, as the firstborn from the dead. These concepts need to be examined in some detail in order to appreciate their significance for the letter's internal christological argument.

To begin with, the hymn emphasizes Christ as the firstborn of all

³⁴ Divine wisdom identifies another key theme for the author, cf. 1.9, 26-28, 2.2-3, 3.10.

³⁵ Cf. Witold Marchal, *Abba, Père! La Prière du Christ et des Chrétiens* (2nd ed.; AnBib 19A; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971) 190-226; Barth, *Colossians*, 168-170.

³⁶ See above, pp. 125-126.

³⁷ Cf. above, pp. 38-40.

creation – the first temporally and the first in terms of rank.³⁸ As the perfect image (εἰκών) of God, Christ constitutes the original pattern according to which all things, particularly all people, have been created since the beginning of time.³⁹ God created all things in, through, and for Christ.⁴⁰ It follows for the author that Christ is also that same divine pattern according to which those called as part of God's eschatological community are being renewed (3.10).⁴¹ This establishes Christ as the absolute criterion of cosmic order and as the ultimate vehicle of divine will for constituting that order in all its aspects and throughout eternity.⁴² Nothing in creation exists independently of Christ and nothing has any ultimate purpose except insofar as it is in and for Christ.⁴³

This divinely-instituted state of affairs is related directly in the hymn to the fallen condition of the cosmos. At some unstated point in time, the whole of creation became alienated from its creator, and the forces of evil and of death sullied the fabric of existence.⁴⁴ Christ, who was alone without need of being reconciled with God, is the agent through whom God reconciles all things and makes peace. It is in this capacity that the Jesus Christ of human history emerges. Through his crucifixion, death, and resurrection, Christ became "preeminent" (πρωτεύων) over all things, vanquishing the forces of death. Resurrection is the ultimate manifestation of God's purpose in Christ, an event in history that changes the nature of reality, the nature of the relationship between creator and cre-

³⁸ There is widespread agreement that the language of the hymn allows no firm decision as to whether Christ is meant to be understood as actually part of creation or was "born first" before creation; see Wedderburn, *Theology*, 25; differently, Aletti, *Colossiens*, 94-98.

³⁹ Cf. II Corinthians 4.4, Philippians 2.6; Eltester, *Eikon*, 130-152; Nikolaus Kehl, *Der Christushymnus im Kolosserbrief: Eine motiengeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Kol 1,12-20* (SBM 1; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1967) 57-76; Jervell, *Imago Dei*, 218-226; Kim, *Origin*, 137 ff.; Fowl, *Story of Christ*, 104-107.

⁴⁰ On the meaning of the prepositions in 1.16 see the commentaries; of the three, the phrase ἐν αὐτῷ presents the greatest challenge for interpretation; see Gnllka, *Kolosserbrief*, 64; Kehl, *Christushymnus*, 102-108.

⁴¹ Cf. Romans 8.29, 12.2, I Corinthians 15.49, II Corinthians 3.18, 4.16, 11.7, Philippians 3.21; Jervell, *Imago Dei*, 231-256.

⁴² Hans Wildberger ("Das Abbild Gottes," *TZ* 21 [1965] 245-259, 481-501, esp. 496-501) relates the claims of 1.15 to the description of the saving event of 1.13, clarifying the royal status and divine power conveyed by the imagery.

⁴³ Cf. Romans 11.36, I Corinthians 8.6; for other parallels see Feuillet, *Christ*, 214-215. Also cf. Wolfgang Pöhlmann, "Die hymnischen All-Prädikationen in Kol 1:15-20," *ZNW* 64 (1973) 53-74, who surveys ancient hymns from a host of different settings.

⁴⁴ It is entirely possible that the myth informing this hymn presupposes no fall, in the usual sense of the term, but may assume that creation from the beginning had never been what it was intended to be. Such a scenario may be inferred from a number of ancient texts, e.g., Philo, *De Opificio Mundi* 72-75.

ation.⁴⁵ Reconciliation in Christ, then, like creation in Christ, is all-embracing. But, as 1.20 shows, the preeminence that Christ now has, unlike that associated with his agency in creation, was attained through his human suffering, through his blood shed on the cross. The eschatological age is determined and characterized by the suffering of Christ and of God's elect.⁴⁶

The might of God as manifested in the death and resurrection of Christ takes on decisive and probative meaning for the letter's soteriology. At the resurrection, "all the fullness" (πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα), which is most likely a circumlocution for God,⁴⁷ was pleased to dwell in Christ (1.19).⁴⁸ The language of this verse, in typically Jewish fashion, draws attention to the concepts of divine election and of the immanence of God.⁴⁹ The author makes the idea behind this hymnic affirmation somewhat clearer in the polemic of 2.9: all the fullness "of divinity" (τῆς θεότητος) dwells in Christ.⁵⁰ The complete and abiding essence of God is continually present in Christ, and Christ enjoys hegemony over any sort of spiritual power that may exist in the universe. Furthermore, this essence is present in Christ σωματικῶς, as he assumed a bodily form, an allusion to the corporeal existence of the risen Christ⁵¹ and perhaps also to the church, the body of which Christ is the head.⁵² This symbol of σῶμα and its particular renderings in the epistle occupy a key position in the author's interpretation of traditional christological assertions for the audience.⁵³ To be sure, he takes the cosmic christology of the hymn as a

⁴⁵ Christoph Burger, *Schöpfung und Versöhnung: Studien zum liturgischen Gut im Kolosser- und Epheserbrief* (WMANT 46; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1975) 52-53.

⁴⁶ Cf. Kleinknecht, *Gerechtfertigte*, 377-380, and passim; also above, pp. 73-77.

⁴⁷ In addition to the commentaries see Gerhard Munderlein, "Die Erwählung durch das Pleroma: Bemerkungen zu Kol. i.19," *NTS* 8 (1961-62) 264-276; Josef Ernst, *Pleroma und Pleroma Christi: Geschichte und Deutung eines Begriffs der paulinischen Antilegomena* (BU 5; Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1970) 83-87.

⁴⁸ With this we may compare Romans 1.3-4; cf. Kehl, *Christushymnus*, 120-125; Gnllka, *Kolosserbrief*, 73; Fowl, *Story of Christ*, 116; Wedderburn, *Theology*, 32-33.

⁴⁹ On πλήρωμα in 1.19, in addition to the commentaries, see Ernst, *Pleroma*, 72-94; the meaning here is indebted esp. to the Old Testament background; see Kehl, *Christushymnus*, 116-125; cf. Ernst, *Pleroma*, 22-30.

⁵⁰ On the possible distinction between θεότης and θεϊότης at work in this verse see Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 181-182; Ernst, *Pleroma*, 100-101; Gnllka, *Kolosserbrief*, 128; Wolter, *Brief*, 125-126.

⁵¹ Cf. I Corinthians 15.44, Philippians 3.21; Schweizer, *Colossians*, 138-139; Pokorny, *Colossians*, 122; Wedderburn, *Theology*, 37.

⁵² Cf. Pierre Benoit, "Corps, Tête et Plérôme dans les Epîtres de la Captivité," *RB* 63 (1956) 5-44, esp. 37-40; Burger, *Schöpfung*, 89; cf. Gnllka, *Kolosserbrief*, 129; differently, Ernst, *Pleroma*, 101-102.

⁵³ Aletti's commentary in particular emphasizes this dimension of the epistle's theology.

foundational frame of reference for this interpretation.⁵⁴ In the hymn's prior rendition, *σῶμα* referred to the entire created order, the cosmic body, of which Christ is the head.⁵⁵ Yet, such a conceptuality cannot be said to represent the gist or the real objective of the author's reflection, even if he does not deny its claim. While he affirms the universal dimensions of Christ's status and sustaining work as articulated in the hymn, in his additions to the hymn and in what follows in the epistle the letter-writer consistently focuses and adjusts these concepts in light of the specific redemption of *people* that is accomplished in Christ.⁵⁶

This suggests that the religious problem being addressed by the text does not revolve around uncertainties pertaining to christology *per se*, but rather (as Paul sees things) around the Colossians' need of instruction as to the soteriological implications of the gospel of Christ for their lives.⁵⁷ The uncertainty that troubles the congregation does not concern so much questions such as whether or not the fullness of deity dwells in Christ, but whether and how this fullness is accessible to Christians, and the manner in which it is perceived to transform human existence in fundamental ways.⁵⁸ This way of concentrating on the practical implications of faith assertions for one's moral direction is in keeping with the text's paraenetic character.

We can examine this aspect of the letter's appeal plainly on numerous occasions, for instance, 2.13-15. Here the main point of God's cosmic victory in Christ does not consist of the subjugation of the hostile principalities and powers, so that they are debilitated and thus reconciled with God, but is to be located in the forgiveness "of all our sins" and the setting aside of the *δόγματα* "that stood against us." In this passage, as throughout 2.8-23 (and in a manner not made explicit by the hymn in 1.15-20), the cosmic powers are personalized, quasi-divine forces that are not simply estranged from God, but which exercise corrupting influence in a quite immediate sense over humanity. They do so by requiring certain rituals and practices before allowing ascent into the heavenly regions or reveal-

⁵⁴ On how the concepts of the hymn provide material for the letter's theology see Fowl, *Story of Christ*, 123-154; Wedderburn, *Theology*, 34-48.

⁵⁵ In addition to the commentaries see Ernst, *Pleroma*, 154-156; differently, Kehl, *Christushymnus*, 93-98.

⁵⁶ Pace Kehl, *Christushymnus*, 157-165.

⁵⁷ Cf. Schubert M. Ogden, *The Point of Christology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982) 106 ff., 127 ff., and *passim*.

⁵⁸ Meeks, "In One Body," 211; Wengst, "Versöhnung," 14-26; Fowl, *Story of Christ*, 137; Yates, *Colossians*, xviii.

ing special knowledge.⁵⁹ The lives of those who are in Christ, who benefit from his victory and peacemaking activity,⁶⁰ are not determined by the will and the regulations connected with these cosmic powers (cf. 2.16-17, 20-21).⁶¹ Rather, the existence that Christians now have is Christ (3.3-4), and they are freed to do the will of God as the elect of God and as redeemed citizens in the realm of God's beloved son.

Christ's preeminence in the universe is extended to humanity through the rite of baptism. In his interpretation of this ritual, the letter-writer, in Pauline fashion, underscores the representative nature of Christ's experiences for those who are in him, who are in the body of which he is the head. Colossians 2.11-13 articulates perhaps the fullest expression of the author's baptismal theology, and so on this account can be said to summarize the argument of the entire epistle.⁶² According to these verses, believers have been spiritually circumcised – that is, baptized – in Christ, and in that baptism they have died with Christ (cf. 2.20, 3.3) and been buried with Christ and raised with Christ (cf. 3.1) through faith in the action of God that made Christ the firstborn from the dead (cf. 1.18).⁶³ The thinking behind these affirmations propels the argument of the main body of the letter. In baptism, the author contends, Christians become part of the body of Christ (1.18, 22, 2.19). They put off their fleshly and sinful body (hence the comparison with circumcision: 2.11, 13) in exchange for a spiritual one (cf. 3.3-4).⁶⁴ They take off the "old"

⁵⁹ Cf. Herold Weiss, "Law in the Epistle to the Colossians," *CBQ* 34 (1972) 294-314; Eduard Schweizer, "Slaves of the Elements and Worshippers of Angels: Gal. 4:3, 9 and Col. 2:8, 18, 20," *JBL* 107 (1988) 455-468.

⁶⁰ The victory of God in Christ in Colossians 2.15 is expressed with reference to ancient concepts of ruler-ideology; see Michael Wolter, *Rechtfertigung und zukünftiges Heil: Untersuchungen zu Röm 5,1-11* (BZNW 43; Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1978) 48-62; Peter Marshall, "A Metaphor of Social Shame: ΘΡΑΜΒΕΥΕΙΝ in 2 Cor 2:14," *NovT* 25 (1983) 302-317; Paul B. Duff, "Metaphor, Motif and Meaning: The Rhetorical Strategy Behind the Image 'Led in Triumph' in 2 Corinthians 2:14," *CBQ* 53 (1991) 79-92.

⁶¹ On the connection between the commands of 2.20-21 and the δόγματα of 2.14 see Gnlika, *Kolossierbrief*, 139; Fowl, *Story of Christ*, 143.

⁶² Pokorny, *Colossians*, 126-133.

⁶³ The phrase διὰ τῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐνεργείας τοῦ θεοῦ presents certain problems for the translator; perhaps "through faith produced by the activity of God" captures the sense better; see Harris, *Colossians*, 105. On the tradition of being baptized with Christ see Peter Siber, *Mit Christus Leben: Eine Studie zur paulinischen Auferstehungshoffnung* (ATANT 61; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1971) 191-213; Wedderburn, *Baptism*, 342-356.

⁶⁴ On the (partial) identification of baptism with circumcision in Colossians 2.11 (in which case the phrase "circumcision of Christ" contains a genitive of quality) see Lohse, *Colossians*, 101-103; Gnlika, *Kolossierbrief*, 131-132; Burger, *Schöpfung*, 91-94; Zeilinger, *Erstgeborene*, 144; Pokorny, *Colossians*, 124-125.

human self,⁶⁵ putting to death its moral vices (3.5, 8-9), and put on the "new" human being (3.10), with its Christ-like virtues (3.10 ff.), as they are filled in Christ, who in his death and resurrection has overcome the *stoicheia* (2.10, 20) and become the permanent dwelling place of God's fullness (1.19, 2.9). The Colossians are raised to a new life, a new realm of existence in Christ, by God's power (1.12-14, 21-22, 2.12-13, 3.1). In Christ and only in Christ, they have access to all the treasures of divine wisdom. And it is in the knowledge of God that they grow as they strive for good works that are pleasing to Christ (1.9-10, 2.3).⁶⁶

Above all, life in Christ is taken as an eschatological reality. Christians set their minds, priorities, and whole manner of existence on "what is above," what will be revealed in conjunction with the divine plan for human fulfillment at the end of history (3.1-4).⁶⁷ No doubt the author's manner of describing for the audience τὰ ἄνω is meant to be germane to their ecclesial situation. As we saw in Chapter One, access to the heavenly regions constituted a preoccupation of the errorists' religion; and it appears that Paul's reflections address their position, if only indirectly. Specifically, the true glory of which he speaks contrasts with the vain, earthly, and transitory visions of these heavenly aspirants insofar as it points to a total transformation of the human self, anticipating an eschatological restoration of paradise, of human wholeness and immortality. The new humanity in Colossians forms the basis of the new life experienced by the community through baptism. An important (and polemical) consequence of this reasoning is that the determinative revelation of God's glory, of heaven, of the angelic host, and of Christ does not occur in this age or through human manipulation, but will take place only at the initiative of God, and only in the end of the age.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ On the connection between 2.11 (stripping off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ) and 3.9 (stripping off the old human being with its vices) cf. Schweizer, *Colossians*, 143; Burger, *Schöpfung*, 94-95; Zeilinger, *Erstgeborene*, 144-145; cf. Romans 6.6, 11, 7.24, Ephesians 4.22-24.

⁶⁶ Pokorny, *Colossians*, 128: "Through baptism the believer is drawn into God's eschatological act of redemption." Meeks ("In One Body," 210, 213) suggests that "the 'rising with Christ' which is pre-enacted in baptism is equivalent to an enthronement in heaven." Cf. Colossians 1.12-13, 2.12-13, 20, 3.1-4.

⁶⁷ Cf. Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 65.16: "[T]his body of ours is a weight upon the soul and its penance; as the load presses down the soul is crushed and is in bondage, unless philosophy has come to its assistance and has bid it take fresh courage by contemplating the universe, and has turned it from things earthly to things divine. There it has its liberty, there it can roam abroad; meantime it escapes the custody in which it is bound, and renews its life in heaven."

⁶⁸ Levison, "Apocalyptic Dimension," 97-104.

These observations, taken together, reveal the human and moral dimensions of the letter-writer's christological reflections. Nevertheless, as much as the author's orientation in describing the agency of Christ can accurately be said to be anthropocentric in character, it should be underscored that this orientation is in particular and in its complete sense ecclesiological in character. While Christ may be the head of every principality and power and preeminent over all things, the author clearly wants to draw the readers' attention to Christ's role as the head of the body, which in this context is not a reference to the cosmos, but to the church universal (1.18, 2.19).⁶⁹ Above all it is among the members of the ἐκκλησία that Christ's supremacy, which includes God's activity of reconciliation, redemption, and forgiveness, is acknowledged, even if Christ's power extends to all parts of the universe.⁷⁰ Thus we might properly speak of the two-fold authority of Christ as expounded in Colossians.⁷¹ Outside the sphere of the ἐκκλησία, Christ's objective authority still seems to be in some sense hidden and unacknowledged, and the realm of darkness continues to engulf many people (1.13, 21), despite the fundamental transformations depicted in 1.18-20, 2.13-15. Christ's role is manifest only within a certain domain, the church.⁷²

The special relationship of the church to Christ is summarized most effectively in its confession of him as κύριος, Lord, a title which possesses weighty and wide-ranging ramifications for human identity within the epistle's symbolic world.⁷³ As Lord, Christ is the heavenly victor and ruler who sits at God's right hand and executes God's will (1.13, 2.15, 3.1, 4.1). Because the essence of the church is Christ, all aspects of its existence must be in conformity with Christ. As the church becomes the holy community called by God (3.12, 15), it actualizes in the realm of human history the peacemaking, the reconciliation, and the renewal achieved by God in Christ.⁷⁴ This fixes the community's present identity as well as its eschatological orientation (3.3-4). In the author's appeal, the life effected by the church does not so much entail the imitation of Christ as it does the exhibition of moral conduct that is deemed "worthy," ἄξιος, of the Lord (1.10). This concept evidently identifies not only the *telos* of human action

⁶⁹ On the dual sense of κεφαλή in the text see esp. Gnllka, *Kolossarbrief*, 131; cf. Fowl, *Story of Christ*, 112-113.

⁷⁰ Wedderburn, *Theology*, 41.

⁷¹ Pokorny, *Colossians*, 148.

⁷² Zeilinger, *Erstgeborene*, 203.

⁷³ Neugebauer, *In Christus*, 131-149; Werner Kramer, *Christ, Lord, Son of God* (SBT 50; Naperville: Allenson, 1966) 169-176.

⁷⁴ Wedderburn, *Theology*, 30.

for the letter-writer, but indicates also specific categories and manners of obedience.⁷⁵ This is particularly true in the moral exhortation of 3.5-4.1, where the readers are enjoined to take on virtues that advance God's work in Christ, virtues that build unity and harmony in the community (the body of which Christ is the head) and in the world. The objective of moral activities and traits within the community that are analogous to those experienced in Christ plays a notable part here.⁷⁶ Thus, as 3.15 puts it, the peace of Christ, the peace achieved by God through Christ (cf. 1.20), is to "rule" (βραβεύειν, cf. 2.18) in their hearts. They are to forgive one another just as the Lord forgave them (3.13, cf. 1.14, 2.13). Slaves are to serve their masters as though they were working for the Lord and in fear of the Lord (3.22-24). All in all, obedience to Christ demonstrates the unity in and with Christ that the church has received and continues to experience (3.10-11, 17).

The acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord becomes especially important for the ethics of Colossians in the household code of 3.18-4.1, where the title is applied no less than seven times in nine verses. The arena of Christ's lordship is to be established through the observance of Christian obligations in all basic interpersonal relationships and social institutions, even when the individuals involved are not necessarily members of the community, or when the institutions themselves are not specifically Christian in origin or nature. In this way the authority of Christ is extended and grows in the world through moral action that is executed explicitly as service to the Lord. As in 3.5 ff., the recommendations of the *Haustafel* support a general sense of peace, harmony, and mutual edification as basic to Christian social concern.

The lordship of Christ also establishes the specific disposition of the members of the community toward God, their Father and creator: they are to observe a manner of religion characterized by thankfulness, a key concept for the letter (1.3, 12, 2.7, 3.15-17, 4.2).

⁷⁵ Although the term ἄξιος (Latin, *dignus*) plainly belongs to the vernacular of Hellenistic morality, its background and meaning have yet to be clarified by modern scholarship; the concept in Colossians suggests a sense of proportionality to God's nature and/or appropriateness to God's plan, a matter of suitability and value determined by divine criteria; see *TDNT* 1.379-380; *EDNT* 1.113. Some examples: Epictetus, *Diatribae* 1.29.47, 49, 2.1.39, 4.8.30, 32, *Encheiridion* 15; Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 10.189, 12.209, 15.263-265, 17.293; Iamblichus, *De Vita Pythagorica* 17.72, 18.80; *Socraticorum Epistulae* 27.4; Philo, *Legum Allegoriae* 3.10, 141, 164, *De Mutatione Nominum* 52, 58, *De Abrahamo* 204, *De Vita Mosis* 1.148, 2.135, *De Specialibus Legibus* 1.43, 284; Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 44.3.

⁷⁶ Wengst, "Versöhnung," 24-26; Schenk, "Christus," 151-152; Meeks, "To Walk Worthily," 42-44.

As the author's formulation of 3.16 demonstrates, the worship of God is a necessary social act of the church. Psalms, hymns, and odes inspired by the Spirit and directed to God are among the primary means by which individuals in the church instruct and admonish one another. As the following verse makes plain, since all of life comes under Christ's authority, everything the believer does, in every situation, must happen both "in the name of the Lord Jesus"⁷⁷ and in thanksgiving to God through Christ. Indeed, the confession of Jesus as Lord through one's words and deeds is the way that Christians must give thanks to God. Thanksgiving, therefore, is a constituent and accompaniment of all moral action, and, insofar as this activity is distinguished by being in Christ, thanksgiving to God is "through" Christ.⁷⁸

Polemic and Correction in Paraenetic Discourse

Owing to the nature of paraenesis as a mode of communication, moral philosophers were almost constantly interacting with teachings that were not original either to them or to their respective ideological traditions. Sometimes this material belonged to the moral or religious heritage of the prevailing culture; sometimes it developed in disparate philosophic or intellectual circles. As the individual examples of paraenesis examined thus far have indicated, the approaches adopted by teachers in handling "foreign" ideas could vary widely, ranging from approval (either apparent or implied), to comparison and contrast, to deliberate critique, to outright condemnation.⁷⁹ It is to these categories of critique, correction, and condemnation that we now turn, in order to understand better how the author of Colossians presents and shapes the "character" of the opposition, the "philosophy and empty deceit" of 2.8, within the context of the overall project of Christian theological instruction contained in the epistle. Our letter-writer, like many paraenetic guides, sees as essential to his task the establishment of boundaries for separating what is legitimate from what is unacceptable. This involves both direct inter-

⁷⁷ Possibly this refers to a traditional baptismal formula, in a manner that would be appropriate to the context of 3.5 ff.; cf. Acts 10.48, I Corinthians 1.13, 6.11; TDNT 5.268, 274-276.

⁷⁸ See Lohse, *Colossians*, 152-153, with references; also Günther Harder, *Paulus und das Gebet* (NTF 10; Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1936) 175-183; Kramer, *Christ*, 84-90; differently, Peter T. O'Brien, *Introductory Thanksgivings in the Letters of Paul* (NovTSup 49; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977) 204-206.

⁷⁹ As Epictetus emphasizes (*Diatribae* 2.11.13-15, 23-24), the ἀρχή of philosophy is the ability to recognize conflicting opinions and to judge critically different views, in accordance with one's principles.

action with alternative versions of social and cognitive reality that threaten the health of the readers as well as the conveyance of established criteria by which various beliefs and practices may be evaluated within the scope of the movement's symbolic universe, all with the intention of reinforcing group cohesion and identity.⁸⁰ In confronting harmful concepts, the author of *Colossians*, in a manner consistent with prevailing paraenetic strategies, not only critiques the concepts themselves, but takes into consideration as part of the polemic a critical evaluation of the activities of those individuals who espouse such concepts.

Generally speaking, paraenesis attempts to manage some situation of behavioral or epistemological crisis among neophytes. Sometimes this crisis is brought on by the interference of an outside teacher or rival group. It stands to reason that there would be nearly as many ways of deprecating rival positions in the paraenetic literature and as many discernible objectives in so doing as there are extant examples of such paraenetic discourse. So, for instance, a philosopher may simply busy himself with refuting different ideas in a calm and academic manner, with the aim of leading initiates to an improved and more sophisticated comprehension of their own tenets. In other cases the reader finds direct assault and censure, often of a personal or seemingly personal nature, sometimes laced with irony and sarcasm, intended to subvert rival opinions and undermine the authority of those who hold them. And in still other instances the critique is conducted more in the manner of apologetic, as the master apparently counters external criticisms of his own positions.⁸¹ By and large, while the language of refutation may be aimed at a third party external to the exhortatory exchange, the substance of what is said is intended for the benefit of the addressees, the students, in order to correct, educate, and direct them. As Luke Timothy Johnson observes, ancient polemic "was primarily for internal consumption." The purpose of polemical discourse, generally, "is not so much the rebuttal of the opponents as the edification of one's school."⁸² In paraenetic writings, the characterization of one's competitors is meant to construct for the readers a negative model of the authentic

⁸⁰ Cf. Perdue, "James," 255-256; idem, "Social Character," 25-26; Newman, "Cotidie Meditare," 1480-1481, 1483, 1489-1490, 1497-1501.

⁸¹ A representative survey is provided by Knut Kleve, "The Philosophical Polemics in Lucretius: A Study in the History of Epicurean Criticism," *Lucretius* (Foundation Hardt, Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique 24; Genève: Vandœuvres, 1977) 39-75.

⁸² Luke Timothy Johnson, "The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic," *JBL* 108 (1989) 433.

philosophic life, something or someone for them to steer clear of, which contrasts unfavorably with any positive models offered for consideration. This strategy indirectly provides the neophyte with practical standards for judging one's teachers, leaders, companions, and one's own status in the movement. This dovetails also with the basic responsibility of the mentor to arouse in the pupils the consciousness of error – even of guilt or shame – in order to prepare them better for self-evaluation.⁸³

It also stands to reason that we encounter in the literature of moral exhortation different levels of explicitness in identifying one's adversaries or the specific origin of the ideas being confronted. Sometimes those condemned will be named individually, and sometimes they will be identified by their school, though more often they seem to remain anonymous.⁸⁴ Naturally the type of target one finds in paraenetic critique will vary as well. It may be the general public, or it may be a specific group, like the wealthy or the citizens of a particular city, or it may be a rival philosophic movement, or it may be specific individuals. In the majority of instances, it appears that the members of the opposition belong to the world of real experience and can be identified (if even tentatively) as historical personages, though on many occasions the people or groups refuted constitute literary inventions of the author, straw men designed for maximum impact.⁸⁵ There are also different levels of explicitness in the presentation of opposed viewpoints and materials. In some cases, these are plainly quoted; in others they are summarized; and in other instances the instructor will simply refer to them without acknowledging their origin. With each case it is fair to expect that the paraenetic author presents such viewpoints and materials in a fashion that best suits his objectives in writing.

Obviously, the criteria employed in the paraenetic materials for evaluating external opinions will differ significantly, depending on the ideological assumptions of a particular philosopher and the specific circumstances surrounding the confrontation at hand. A thor-

⁸³ Cf. Plutarch, *De Recta Ratione Audiendi* 46C-47B, with Brian P. Hillyard, *Plutarch: De Audiendo* (MCS; New York: Arno, 1981) 223-238.

⁸⁴ Kleve, "Philosophical Polemics," 44, 49, 59, 65; see, e.g., Plutarch, *Adversus Colotem* 1120C, and passim; the rationale for the last of these strategies varies and is not always clear; perhaps the author is not aware of the identity of the opposition, sometimes the opposition is so familiar that identification seems gratuitous, sometimes no specific group is in mind, or perhaps for whatever reason the author wants to avoid mentioning the actual name of the opponent(s).

⁸⁵ For instance, the practice of addressing imaginary interlocutors in Epictetus' *Diatribae*, for which see Stanley K. Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul's Letter to the Romans* (SBLDS 57; Chico: Scholars Press, 1981) 79-118.

ough accounting of such criteria and the manifold ways that they could be applied would occupy a separate volume, and so some means for effectively focusing our comparative survey of the philosophic texts is in order. The letter-writer's identification of the opposition at Colossae as (being informed by) "philosophy and vain deceit" suggests one appropriate avenue for comparison, namely, the critique in philosophic paraenesis of rival philosophers and philosophic movements. While this variety of correction could take on many different shapes and perspectives, at least a few categories associated with its operation can be identified as more or less conventional. For the most part, it is safe to say that these categories for censuring philosophic antagonists capitalize on prevailing public misgivings about the philosophic profession per se and the common negative caricature of the Greco-Roman philosopher, such as the student of ancient literature encounters frequently and vividly in the writings of Lucian.⁸⁶

One of the most basic and apparently most damaging charges leveled by paraenetic authors against rival philosophers had to do with any internal inconsistencies or inherent contradictions that could be detected within the patterns of thought and action they endorsed. Indeed this might be said to summarize the main qualities of this brand of criticism. An allegation of this variety could be directed at a particular contradiction in another movement's doctrinal system.⁸⁷ In *Diatribe* 1.23, for instance, Epictetus complains that while Epicurus acknowledged the essentially social nature of human existence, he nevertheless dissuaded his followers from rearing children or participating in political life. Epictetus sees this reasoning not only as internally inconsistent, but also as contrary to the nature and experience of all living things. He wonders sarcastically what Epicurus' parents would have made of his advice not to bear offspring.⁸⁸

Related to this is another and more common type of contradiction present in paraenetic polemic that concerns the inconsistency between what an opponent says and what he actually does. This connects with more wide-ranging discussions among ancient moral

⁸⁶ Jennifer A. Hall, *Lucian's Satire* (MCS; New York: Arno, 1981) 151-193; C.P. Jones, *Culture and Society in Lucian* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1986) 24-32; Diskin Clay, "Lucian of Samosata: Four Philosophical Lives," *ANRW* II.36.5 (1992) 14-20, 30-45. The first-century's contempt for philosophers – suspected of crass, anti-social, even subversive behavior – in public (and particularly political) circles was widespread; see the informative discussion by Ramsay MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Unrest and Alienation in the Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966) 46-94.

⁸⁷ Cf. Kleve, "Philosophical Polemics," 47, 58.

⁸⁸ Cf. Epictetus, *Diatribe* 1.5, 2.20, 3.7.

thinkers regarding the critique of hypocrisy, which formed part of the overall evaluation of the human condition.⁸⁹ As Musonius Rufus contends, it is not enough for the one who would call himself a philosopher to lecture capably on virtue, he must also demonstrate virtue personally and exemplify it in his own labor.⁹⁰ If philosophers do not actually practice in the doctrines they teach, they cannot legitimately lay claim to these doctrines as their own; they are simply stolen from others who are more worthy. Because learning has not informed conduct in their own character, they are in no position to instruct others as to how they should reform themselves and seek amendment.⁹¹ The teacher who fails to put his teachings to the test, then, is a fraud and a swindler, a philosopher in name only.⁹² Here we encounter the condemnation of the ἀλαζονεία ("imposture") of the rival philosopher, a common theme of paraenetic refutation.⁹³ Writers often picture their opponent as a pseudo-philosopher, an arrogant and vain⁹⁴ braggart who prides himself on the things he can say and the way that he can say them, but which things, in fact, he is unable or unwilling to do.⁹⁵ Similarly, paraenetic authors warn their pupils that one should not be misled by appearances; it is not the

⁸⁹ On this topic see Ulrich Wilckens (with Alois Kehl and Karl Hoheisel), "Heuchelei," *RAC* 14 (1988) 1206-1231.

⁹⁰ See esp. Musonius Rufus, *Fragmenta* 11.60.4-11.63.6, cf. 5.19.15-5.22.3.

⁹¹ Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 108.36 is typical: "I hold that no man has treated humanity worse than he who has studied philosophy as if it were some marketable trade, who lives in a different manner from that which he advises. For those who are liable to every fault which they castigate advertise themselves as patterns of useless training." Further, Epictetus, *Diatribae* 2.9.13-22, 2.19.5-28; Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 117.33; Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 70.7-8; Maximus of Tyre, *Orationes* 15.2; cf. Epictetus, *Diatribae* 3.24.78-83; Pseudo-Crates, *Epistulae* 6; Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 29.5-7, 33.8, 108.23, 111.3, 114.1 ff., *De Vita Beata* 18-20.

⁹² On the philosopher ὀνόματι μόνον see, for instance, Musonius Rufus, *Fragmenta* 17.92.17-17.93.2; Epictetus, *Diatribae* 3.26.13; cf. Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 13.11, 32.8-9, 34.2-3, 49.11, 77/78.34; Maximus of Tyre, *Orationes* 33.2; Apollonius, *Epistulae* 43, 51; Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 5.2.

⁹³ In addition to what follows see Epictetus, *Diatribae* 2.13.23, 2.19.19, 3.24.43; *Socraticorum Epistulae* 13; Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 70.10 (cf. 55.7); Iamblichus, *De Vita Pythagorica* 33.234; Plutarch, *Adversus Colotem* 1117D; cf. Hall, *Satire*, 186 ff.; Glad, *Paul*, 114-118.

⁹⁴ κενός; Epictetus, *Diatribae* 2.17.6, 8, 12.19.8, 4.1.177, 4.4.35; cf. Malherbe, "Gentle," 205, n.5; also the discussion of Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* below, p. 165, n. 138, 144. On τὰ κενά in Plutarch, *De Recta Ratione Audiendi* 41B cf. Hillyard, *Plutarch*, 103 ff. Philo frequently rails against "vain opinion(s)," e.g., *De Fuga et Inventione* 128, *De Somniis* 1.82, 126, 255, 2.16, 42, *Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit* 66, *De Vita Contemplativa* 17.

⁹⁵ E.g., Musonius Rufus, *Fragmenta* 3.12.5-19; Epictetus, *Diatribae* 1.8.4-10, 1.21.3-4, 2.19.8-10, 3.2.5-18, 3.23.9-32; Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 20.2, 48.11, 88.42-43; Apollonius, *Epistulae* 5; Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 13.11-12, cf. 24.3, also cf. *Orationes* 66: ΠΕΡΙ ΔΟΞΗΣ. On the φιλοδοξία of the philosophic profession see Johnson, "Anti-Jewish Slander," 432-433, n. 47.

garb or manner that makes the true philosopher, but his life.⁹⁶ Insisting on a higher standard for others than for himself, the pseudo-philosopher passes judgment and ridicules anyone who disagrees or does not understand.⁹⁷ Such a pretentious impostor, as Dio Chrysostom puts it, deceives (ἐξαπατῆσαι) both others and himself.⁹⁸ It is the duty of the true philosopher to expose such hypocrites and the injurious effects of their work.⁹⁹

The implications of such arrogance and hypocrisy for the *topoi* of paraenetic critique are manifold. To illustrate: exhortatory authors often protest that their competitors are preoccupied with the subtleties of academic logic and argumentation, more concerned with making an exhibition of their convoluted hypotheses and learned syllogisms than with identifying practical matters that have to do with obtaining virtue.¹⁰⁰ Charlatans of this ilk, as they are characterized in paraenesis, place a higher value on their ability to deliver an impressive lecture and their reputation for eloquence than on the substance of their teachings. The words of these people, although moving and polished, are in truth trifling and glib, actually ineffective for inspiring listeners to correct their vices.¹⁰¹ Epictetus, like many other ancient moralists, regularly cautions his students about the deceptive power of argumentation and persuasive reasoning (δύναμις...ἐπιχειρητική καὶ πιθανολογική).¹⁰² Crowds of onlookers, he notes, are not infrequently "seized" by the philosopher's petty tricks

⁹⁶ E.g., Epictetus, *Diatribae* 2.19.28, 4.8.4-14, 34-43; Maximus of Tyre, *Orationes* 1.10; Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 49.11-12, cf. 72.16.

⁹⁷ E.g., Epictetus, *Diatribae* 1.29.50-54, 2.11.8-25, 3.2.14, 4.8.34-43; Pseudo-Diogenes, *Epistulae* 50; Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 64.3, 71.22-23; Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 72.6-7, cf. 8.9.

⁹⁸ Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 70.10; also Epictetus, *Diatribae* 2.9.18-22, 2.20.37, 2.24.19-20, 3.7.29, 4.8.38-39; Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 42.1-5, 48.10-11, 111.2-4. On the ἀπάτη and πλάνη of the false philosopher see Malherbe, "Hellenistic Moralists," 295, n. 136.

⁹⁹ Apollonius of Tyana, for instance, attacked the Stoic Euphrates as a pretended and venal philosopher: Apollonius, *Epistulae* 1-8, 14-18, 50-52, 60, 79-80, cf. 43. Cf. G.E.L. Owen ("Philosophical Invective," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 1 [1983] 1-25), who indicates how widespread the practice of slander and defamation was in the early Hellenistic period.

¹⁰⁰ Musonius Rufus, *Fragmenta* 1.5.3-11, 3.12.5-19; Epictetus, *Diatribae* 1.26.8-10, 2.1.33-40, 2.19.8-15, 20-24, 3.2.6-7, 3.23.23-24, 3.24.78-83; Maximus of Tyre, *Orationes* 1.8, 26.2; Pseudo-Diogenes, *Epistulae* 38.1, 50; Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 45.4-5, 8-9, 49.7-8, 71.6, 82.7-24, 83.8-9, 102.20-21, 117.19-20, 25.

¹⁰¹ Musonius Rufus, *Fragmenta* 49.130.8-49.131.24; Epictetus, *Diatribae* 2.1.32-33, 2.20.33-35, 2.21.15-22, 2.23.36-47, 4.8.23-29; Plutarch, *De Recta Ratione Audiendi* 40F-42E (with Hillyard, *Plutarch*, 96-137); Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 33.4-5; Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 40.5-8, 13-14, 48.1-12, 108.5-7, 23, 35, 114.3, 117.30-33; cf. *Socraticorum Epistulae* 35, on the man who philosophizes with his brain but not with his emotions or character.

¹⁰² Epictetus, *Diatribae* 1.8.7.

of style and turns of logic.¹⁰³ Iamblichus similarly laments the damage wrought by those who "traffic in fraudulent doctrines or snares...who never devote themselves to anything good," who "entrap young men" and "catch the youth as in a net."¹⁰⁴ This sort of influence over listeners can make a speaker conceited and "puffed up" (πεφυσσημένος).¹⁰⁵ The standard for success exhibited by these charlatans is their own personal advancement and public standing, not the benefits they confer on others. They reveal themselves to be sycophants and flatterers, hungry for the approval of the crowds and thus easily swayed by their fickle opinion.¹⁰⁶ Anyone who follows the teachings or example of such people will be led only to self-deception and bad morals.¹⁰⁷

The categories associated with this mode of paraenetic censure, while illustrative of contemporaneous philosophic repartee, hardly exhaust the range of comparative possibilities for examining the refutation of our letter. The analysis of the false teaching in Chapter One, while tentative in many respects, demonstrated at least that this "philosophy," in conjunction with any philosophic qualities it may have espoused, possessed also clear religious dimensions. There, I suggested that the opposition represents a form of Jewish-Christianity akin to Elchasaitism, a movement with apocalyptic, mystical, ascetic, and syncretic tendencies that emerged in Syria some two or three decades after Colossians was penned. We can infer, in light of this analysis, that the issue being addressed by the epistle through its affirmations, warnings, and exhortations constitutes a religious dispute of some kind; the debate at Colossae is between two religious groups and relates directly to the form of religion that the addressees

¹⁰³ Epictetus, *Diatribae* 2.23.41; cf. Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 48.10 (on the philosopher who "ensnares" people with technicalities), 111.5 (on philosophic subtleties and trifles that "occupy and hold the soul"); *Socraticorum Epistulae* 27.5 (in addressing the reader, the author is pleased that "no one has yet robbed you of philosophy"); *Carmen Aureum* 21-26 (with Thom, *Golden Verses*, 146-152); Plutarch, *De Recta Ratione Audiendi* 41C (the philosopher's empty show "sweeps away" listeners; cf. Hillyard, *Plutarch*, 106).

¹⁰⁴ Iamblichus, *De Vita Pythagorica* 17.76; here Iamblichus is actually quoting from a philosophic epistle supposedly written by Lysis, a Pythagorean sage; on this text see Walter Burkert, "Hellenistische Pseudopythagorica," *Philologus* 105 (1961) 17-28.

¹⁰⁵ Epictetus, *Diatribae* 1.8.10 (cf. 4.8.34-43); also Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 9.21: "foolishly puffed up...and inflated;" Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 114.1.

¹⁰⁶ Epictetus, *Diatribae* 3.2.10-11, 3.23.9 ff.; *Socraticorum Epistulae* 8; Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 29.11-12, 44.6; Iamblichus, *De Vita Pythagorica* 34.245-246; Maximus of Tyre, *Orationes* 25.5-6; Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 77/78.34-36, cf. 4.131-132, 32.8-11, 18-20, 35.8, 54.1; on the folly of following popular δόξα cf. *Orationes* 67 and 68.

¹⁰⁷ In *Diatribae* 3.7.19-23, e.g., Epictetus argues that Epicurean doctrines undermine public and familial order and the recognition of moral duty; cf. 4.8.12-14; Seneca *Epistulae Morales* 90.35, 108.35-37; Johnson, "Anti-Jewish Slander," 430-432.

observe. The philosophers of the Greco-Roman era, as we have seen, also occupied themselves with questions of a religious nature, and their answers to such questions impacted their paraenetic practices. Instruction of this sort would have been essential to the process of personal indoctrination and worldview-shift fostered by the schools. Philosophic initiates were generally required to terminate previous faith commitments and habits of conceptualizing divine warrants, taking on a new religious perspective and sense of personal accountability. Paraenesis represented a practical tool for reinforcing this process.

While the discussion of religious questions took on many different forms in the intellectual circles of antiquity, a significant amount of inquiry in this regard converged on what we might call the philosophic critique of superstition. This category of discussion formed just one segment of a more comprehensive tradition of the philosophic criticism of established or public religion, a tradition that extended back in time almost to the origins of philosophy itself. In their stance towards established religion, the participants in this tradition ranged from radical (and usually quite theoretical) skepticism¹⁰⁸ to positive, constructive treatments of popular mythology and standard cults and their underlying religious assumptions.¹⁰⁹ Such criticism was ordinarily constructed with an eye to formulating a rational or enlightened or "natural" type of piety, informed by suitable philosophic principles. The basic thrust of such efforts involved the attempt to free religious life from superstition and fear, and to focus the expression of piety not in formal worship but in a proper conception of deity, philosophically conceived. Consequently, the sages often aimed their censure at such trappings of popular religion as divine anthropomorphism (expressed especially in cult images), ritual sacrifice, purity rules, and the public's preoccupation with oracles, divination, astrology, magic, and so forth.¹¹⁰ Given the nature of this disputatious environment, philosophy generally attended to what it saw as the interior, psychological effects of improper religious beliefs and to the demeaning practices that followed from such beliefs; it did so not only in the sphere of religious ritual but particularly in the sphere of moral conduct.

¹⁰⁸ For instance, the thinking associated with Sextus Empiricus, particularly Book III of his *Adversus Dogmaticos* ("Against the Physicists"); see Philip P. Hallie and Sanford G. Etheridge, *Scepticism, Man and God* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1964) 175-215; cf. Nussbaum, *Therapy*, 280-315.

¹⁰⁹ For example, the allegorical interpretation of myths, such as we find in Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride*; see Wilson, *Mysteries*, 164, n. 60.

¹¹⁰ For a convenient survey see Harold W. Attridge, "The Philosophical Critique of Religion under the Early Empire," *ANRW* II.16.1 (1978) 45-78.

It stands to reason that those involved in the education of philosophic initiates raised issues of this sort as part of an ongoing effort to encourage more critically-held habits of religious belief and practice. Just as paraenetic writers deemed it necessary to remind students of the basic theological tenets of their system, as the latter grappled with the concrete issues of habituating that system, they also found it salutary to critique forms of religion that were harmful to personal formation. In order to understand more fully some of the principles at work in this feature of paraenetic discourse we need to examine (if only briefly) the broader, often more technical and non-paraenetic sources for investigating the philosophic critique of superstition, such as Plutarch's *De Superstitione* and Theophrastus' *Characteres* 16. The paraenetic assessment of religion generally presupposes the basic arguments developed in such texts, while concentrating the arguments on their practical implications.

Although the ancient discussion of superstition takes on numerous permutations with varying details, it may be summarized as follows, concentrating on points that will be most serviceable for our comparative analysis. Most critics, to begin with, discovered at the heart of what they labeled superstition a debilitating emotional condition, one built upon unwarranted distrust of the gods and induced by human ignorance and passions.¹¹¹ In many respects, fear constitutes the primary flaw of the superstitious person, manifesting itself in such unnecessary and harmful sentiments as guilt about offenses against the gods, hate and resentment directed towards the gods, anxiety regarding death and the hereafter, or complete resignation to providence, giving up all hope of relieving or resisting misfortune.¹¹² This person, then, is often perceived to be a coward; seized by apprehension and self-doubt, he is unable to act rationally or virtuously.¹¹³ The source of such fear is normally imputed by the sages to those mistaken though prevalent beliefs that have derived histori-

¹¹¹ Plutarch, *De Superstitione* 165B, 165D, 166D, 167B-D; Theophrastus, *Characteres* 16.1; Philo, *De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini* 15; Walter Otto, "Religio und Superstitio," *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 12 (1909) 553; Peter J. Koets, *Δεισιδαιμονία: A Contribution to the Knowledge of the Religious Terminology in Greek* (Purmerend: J. Muusses, 1929) 45-46, 52; L.F. Janssen "'Superstitio' and the Persecution of the Christians," *VC* 33 (1979) 138.

¹¹² Plutarch, *De Superstitione* 166F-167A, 167D-168E, 170D-F; Theophrastus, *Characteres* 16.8, 11; Ernst Reib, "Aberglaube," *RE* I.1 (1893) 91-93; Koets, *Δεισιδαιμονία*, 42, 105; H. Armin Moellering, *Plutarch on Superstition* (rev. ed.; Boston: Christopher, 1963) 33, 63-64, 119-120.

¹¹³ On the *δειλία* of the superstitious man: Plutarch, *De Superstitione* 168C, 168F-169C (and note his maxim in 169C: ἀρετῆς γὰρ ἐλπίς ὁ θεός ἐστίν, οὐ δειλίας πρόφασις, "For god is the hope of virtue, not the excuse of cowardice."); Theophrastus *Characteres* 16.1, cf. 26.1 ff.; Moellering, *Superstition*, 64, 67.

cally not from a divinely-informed comprehension of reality but from human stupidity and weakness. Thus the fundamental philosophic remedy to this predicament consists of efforts to remove ignorance and self-deception and to educate people regarding the truth.¹¹⁴ Contrary to what most individuals have come to believe, the gods, says the philosopher, are not to be impugned with human flaws such as anger or envy. They are not harmful or vengeful in their disposition towards people, but are the source only of goodness and virtue.¹¹⁵

Misapprehension about deity also finds expression according to the philosophic critique in an improper evaluation by the superstitious person as to the effects of ritual practices.¹¹⁶ Superstitious people wrongly suppose that they can influence the realm of the divine. They mistake the obvious, mundane causes of events in the world for signs of supernatural import or involvement, especially as omens of the gods' displeasure. They approach the world as though it were teeming with dangerous, unseen forces that must be appeased in specific ways.¹¹⁷ Consequently, such people assign religious significance to aspects of life where it is entirely inappropriate, offending the gods and neglecting their true obligations. The only valid measure of worship, according to philosophy, is virtue, not devotion to cultic images or fastidiousness in performing ritual observances. The sages often lampoon the superstitious as obsessed with absurd and excessive rites, especially of a penitential or apotropaic nature. Plutarch and Theophrastus list among such superstitious practices ritual immersions and the abstention from certain food or drink for

¹¹⁴ E.g., Plutarch, *De Superstitione* 167E. One of Plutarch's main theses (164E, 165C, etc.) is that superstition originates with ἀμαθία καὶ ἄγνοια περὶ θεῶν; cf. Salvatore Calderone, "Superstitio," *ANRW* I.2 (1972) 380-381.

¹¹⁵ Plutarch, *De Superstitione* 165C, 167D-E, 169C, 169F-170F, 171A-B; Morton Smith, "De Superstitione (Moralia 164E-171F)," *Plutarch's Theological Writings and Early Christian Literature* (ed. Hans Dieter Betz; SCHNT 3; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975) 31.

¹¹⁶ For what follows see Theophrastus, *Characteres* 16.1 ff., with commentary by R. G. Ussher, *The Characters of Theophrastus* (rev. ed.; London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993) 135-157; also Plutarch, *De Superstitione* 166A-B, 167D-E, 168D-E, 169D-E, 171A-B; Koets, *Δεισιδαιμονία*, 35, 45, 49-50; Moellering, *Superstition*, 64-72; also cf. Philo, *Quod Deterius Potiori Insidiari Soleat* 20-21, *De Vita Mosis* 2.106-108.

¹¹⁷ According to Plutarch, *De Superstitione* 165D-E, this would include fear of the elements (earth, sea, air, etc.), which are incorrectly taken as instruments of divine punishment or means of divine communication. This could include also deification of the heavens, e.g., Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus* 1.13-14, *De Decalogo* 66. On the superstitious world as full of demons and spirits see Smith, "De Superstitione," 9-14; Koets, *Δεισιδαιμονία*, 35-40, 45-46, 50; Moellering, *Superstition*, 119-147; Peter Steinmetz, *Theophrast: Charaktere* (Das Worte der Antike 7; 2 vols.; München: Max Hueber, 1960, 1962) 2.182-185.

pious reasons.¹¹⁸ Among the superstitious practices often condemned also is the observance of particular holy days, which are mistakenly invested with religious importance; among such days Plutarch includes the Sabbath.¹¹⁹

It should be emphasized, though, that it is not so much the actual cultic practices or observances themselves that are the butt of the philosophers' criticisms, or even their underlying religious assumptions, but the accompanying ignorance and anxiety that makes the participants conspicuous and anomalous on account of the intent, manner, and fervor of observance.¹²⁰ In antiquity, as today, superstition was a pejorative term selected by a critic to berate certain religions or certain religious opinions and customs from the perspective of his or her own theological judgments. Thus the categorization is inevitably historically and ideologically determined.¹²¹ One way of stating this is that from the vantage point of the critic, the beliefs and actions of the superstitious person are out of sync with a reasonable explanation of reality. As Plutarch puts it, these people seem to be estranged and out of touch, living in their own world.¹²² Consequently, they often fail to recognize their responsibilities in both private and public spheres of life. They appear to be disconnected personally, spiritually, and ethically.

In connection with this, philosophers sometimes censured superstitious practices because they were perceived to be foreign and non-conventional, and hence threatening and immoral. Superstitious people could be condemned partly on account of their perceived failure to heed accepted standards of propriety. The excessiveness of

¹¹⁸ Plutarch, *De Superstitione* 165F-166C, 168D-E; Koets, *Δεισιδαιμονία*, 63-64; Reiß, "Aberglaube," 30, 34-37; Smith, "De Superstitione," 15-16, 27-28. Purity as a superstitious concern: Theophrastus, *Characteres* 16.2, 7, 9, 13, with Hendrik Bolkestein, *Theophrastos' Charakter der Deisidaimonia als Religionsgeschichtliche Urkunde* (Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten 21.2; Giessen: Töpelmann, 1929) 74.

¹¹⁹ On the critique of Sabbath observance as superstitious see Plutarch, *De Superstitione* 169C; Seneca, *De Superstitione* 41; Horace, *Satires* 1.9.67-72; Juvenal, *Satires* 14.96-106; Persius, *Satires* 5.179-184; cf. Robert Goldenberg, "The Jewish Sabbath in the Roman World up to the Time of Constantine the Great," *ANRW* II.19.1 (1979) 414-447. On the superstitious concern with holy days see Plutarch, *De Superstitione* 169D-E; Theophrastus, *Characteres* 16.10; cf. Martin P. Nilsson, *A History of Greek Religion* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1949) 186-189.

¹²⁰ For this observation cf. Smith, "De Superstitione," 2-3; Koets, *Δεισιδαιμονία*, 33; Bolkestein, *Deisidaimonia*, 74-75; Alfonso M. di Nola, "Superstizione," *Enciclopedia delle Religioni* 5 (1973) 1536.

¹²¹ Cf. Mary R. O'Neil, "Superstition," *ER* 14 (1987) 163-166.

¹²² Plutarch, *De Superstitione* 166C; cf. Nicole Belmont, "Superstition and Popular Religion in Western Societies," *Between Belief and Transgression: Structuralist Essays in Religion, History, and Myth* (ed. Michel Izard and Pierre Smith; Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1982) 9-23.

superstitious people would lead them to observe new-fangled and unofficial customs that differed from those prescribed by the established religious authorities and sanctioned by tradition. By and large, the superstitious were seen not only as eccentric and anti-social, but also as engaging in disruptive practices that undermined the community's moral stability.¹²³ Moreover, on account of the seriousness with which they carried out their pious routine, superstitious people could seem to be arrogant and judgmental, berating those who did not share their point of view, standing aloof from the common good.¹²⁴ In a broader cultural context, we may note, too, that the charge of superstition was applied at various times throughout this period by the Roman political authorities to proscribe foreign religious movements thought to pose a threat to the public order or to the welfare of the state.¹²⁵

In line with this, the superstitious could be censured because they misused or corrupted the hallowed religious traditions of the people. Philo, for example, complains about superstitious individuals who misconstrue the biblical "mysteries," while the Stoic geographer Strabo contends that the original traditions of Moses were degraded by "superstitious men" who added dietary laws and circumcision.¹²⁶ Similarly, Plutarch rails against certain myth-makers and so-called religious traditions that preserve nothing more than noxious, invented tales and malevolent rites.¹²⁷ Such comments typify the caricature

¹²³ Plutarch, *De Superstitione* 166B; Cicero, *De Divinatione* 2.148-150. As Morton Smith ("Superstitio," *SBLSP* 20 [1981] 351, cf. 349-355) observes, *superstitio* designated "popular but unofficial practices as distinct – in origin, if not in nature – from those prescribed by legally established religious authorities." See, e.g., Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 39.8-19; Tacitus, *Annals* 12.59, 15.44; Juvenal, *Satires* 14.96-106; Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 2.5.20-21; Cicero, *De Legibus* 2.15-16. Further, Rutherford, *Meditations*, 188-192.

¹²⁴ Koets, *Δεισιδαιμονία*, 43, 49-51, 66-67, 69; cf. Marcus Aurelius, *Ad Se Ipsum* 1.16.3-4.

¹²⁵ L.F. Janssen ("Die Bedeutungsentwicklung von Superstitio/Superstes," *Mnemosyne* 28 [1975] 135-188) describes how the label was often directed at oriental religions, deemed to be "anti-Roman" and posing "a direct threat to the basis of the Roman community" (p. 186, cf. pp. 172-173, 182-185). The authorities "recognized what kind of danger *superstitio* meant for the *res publica*. The goal of *superstitio* was *superstes esse*, the deliverance of the individual or the individual family, which had placed its trust in the foreign cult." (p. 187) In doing so they separated themselves from Roman society, behavior that also evidenced their cowardice (p. 175). Cf. Denise Grodzynski, "Superstitio," *Revue des Etudes Anciennes* 76 (1974) 50-60; David L. Balch, *Let Wives be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter* (SBLMS 26; Chico: Scholars Press, 1981) 65-80.

¹²⁶ Philo, *De Cherubim* 42; Strabo, *Geographica* 16.2.36-37. On circumcision as a superstition cf. Horace, *Satires* 1.9.69-71; Juvenal, *Satires* 14.96-106.

¹²⁷ Plutarch, *De Superstitione* 165F, 166B, 167A, 170B-D, 171B-E; Cicero, *De Divinatione* 2.148-149; cf. Janssen, "Persecution of the Christians," 135-138, 148-153.

of the corrupting influences that the superstitious were thought to have on sacred texts, traditions, and rituals. "Within the exercise of piety and religion," writes Robert Hodgkin, "*superstitio* included violations of the traditions governing the use of the *precatio*, the formula prayer, and the *carmen*, the metrical hymn. Both Plinys," for instance, "saw in the misuse of hymns and prayers the stuff which bred *superstitio*."¹²⁸ As we will see, it appears that differences over the interpretation of religious traditions (including hymns) and ritual (baptism), including charges of corruption, are at the center of the Colossian controversy as well.

The same sorts of ideas and objectives that drive philosophy's critical assessment of superstition are also visibly at work in certain segments of philosophic paraenesis that are correcting in tone though, as we would expect, the manner of discussion in the latter category is carried out predominantly by way of doctrinal reminders and orients itself towards the behavior of the addressees in pragmatic moral situations. Some pertinent illustrations of this polemicizing approach (two of which were examined earlier in this chapter) will demonstrate how paraenetic discourse could incorporate this type of critique.

The intended readers of the *Epistula ad Menoeceum*, to begin with, appear to be novices in the Epicurean school and, as such, the master is nervous that they may fall prey to the erroneous tenets of rival philosophies or to popular misconceptions. Epicurus' remarks, then, are often formulated antithetically, making allusion to rejected competing theories.¹²⁹ The opposition in mind seems to encompass anyone who does not accede to the Epicurean explanation of reality, principally those deluded by the religious presumptions of traditional mythology and civic ritual.

For Epicurus, as we saw above, reformed opinions as to the nature of the gods and their role in human affairs lie at the heart of valid ethics. But before the philosopher is in a position to instruct his pupils in proper concepts regarding the divine, he must first excise the misguided beliefs that they acquired growing up, especially superstitious forebodings and idle speculation about the gods, death, and the hereafter. Epicurus castigates the "common" and impious representation of the gods: how, he wonders, could they possibly experience crude emotions such as anger or envy, or be at all interested in human affairs? The gods in fact enjoy an existence of complete

¹²⁸ Robert Hodgkin, "Superstition," *ABD* 6 (1992) 240.

¹²⁹ On the traditions of Epicurean polemics cf. Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 1.33.93-94.

blessedness, tranquillity, and detachment, posing no threat to human welfare, but serving only as perfect models of virtue and happiness. Epicurus goes on to condemn those who cherish erroneous notions regarding death, both those who fear death as something terrifying and those who personally yearn for death as an end to worldly ills. The fact that both of these views are widespread among the public, notes the master, is an indication of the inconsistencies and disparities that characterize their thinking, which only contributes further to their perturbation.¹³⁰ The sage, says Epicurus, should neither fear death nor hate life, but entertains hope of achieving a state of god-like ἀταραξία and pleasure. The latter of these, a key concept for the epistle, the author also depicts in mostly antithetical terms. Contrary to the contentions of those who do not understand Epicurean doctrine, pleasure for the philosopher is not to be discovered in a luxurious diet or in the satisfaction of carnal lusts, “but in sober reasoning, searching out the motives for all choice, and banishing mere opinions, to which are due the greatest disturbance of the spirit” (132.4-6). One ought to construct the foundation of such a life, according to the instruction of the letter, from the complementary virtues of αὐτάρκεια and φρόνησις. The sage whose conduct is guided by these principles does not regard τύχη as a god (as the masses do) or as a tyrant (as some of the philosophic determinists do)¹³¹ but is convinced that fortune simply affords one of opportunities to demonstrate actions that effectuate belief (§§ 133-135).

Our second example comes from the *Ad Marcellam*, also discussed earlier in this chapter. The exhortation in 11.191-24.384 constitutes a major and distinct section of the epistle¹³² that has been constructed in the nature of a *synkrisis*.¹³³ On one hand, Porphyry lauds the σοφός, an archetype of the godly and wholesome life. Freed from the corrupting forces of the physical realm, the soul of the sage is united with god, his intellect is god’s temple, and the divine is visible in all his words and actions.¹³⁴ Accordingly, the religion of the sage is acceptable to god. His piety does not express itself in lengthy prayers or abundant sacrifices but in virtuous deeds that reflect god’s will (17.281-284, 286-288).¹³⁵ He responds faithfully to the divine sum-

¹³⁰ Bailey, *Epicurus*, 332.

¹³¹ The target is most likely Democritus; cf. *Gnomologium Vaticanum* 40.

¹³² Wicker, *To Marcella*, 96.

¹³³ On σύγκρισις in ancient rhetoric see Theodore Burgess, “Epideictic Literature,” *University of Chicago Studies in Classical Philology* 3 (1902) 125-126; cf. Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 132-148. For analysis of the section see Pötscher, *Porphyrios*, 78-89, 115-126.

¹³⁴ Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 11.191-201, 13.221-225.

¹³⁵ Cf. Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 16.265-269.

mons to venerate and worship god in accordance with the traditional customs – κατὰ τὰ πάτρια (18.294-299).¹³⁶

Contrasted to this paradigm is the individual who is depicted by the author as ignorant, indolent, and impious. This is the “fool,” the man who has been overtaken by the opprobrium of the physical world with its godless desires and deceptions.¹³⁷ His soul, as a result of this fallen condition, becomes a dwelling-place for both evil daemons and “vainglory” (κενοδοξία); thus god’s vision of him is darkened.¹³⁸ The fool is deceived by his ignorance of god. He either denies divine providence and god’s intent to punish injustice, or arrogantly attributes his own wickedness to divine sources.¹³⁹ He believes that he can somehow honor god through rituals even while conducting himself in a depraved manner, contrary to god’s will.¹⁴⁰ His prayers, libations, and offerings, though, are not only unfit for god, but actually dishonor god and only confirm the fool’s self-deception and hybris.¹⁴¹ His “piety” is nothing more than “mindless faith” (ἄλογος πίστις).¹⁴² Even while sacrificing, says Porphyry, the fool is “sacrilegious” and “defiled” and “ungodly.”¹⁴³ People like this are corrupted by delusions that are human in origin (ἀνθρωπίναις ψευδοδοξίαις). But it is neither through the vain words of the sophists (κεναὶς φωναίς) nor through mere human opinions (δόξαις ἀνθρώπων) that one can learn god’s will or be found worthy of god.¹⁴⁴ Filled with such deceit and lies, it is unseemly for this individual even to talk about god;¹⁴⁵ his prayers are nothing but vain talk (μάταιος λόγος).¹⁴⁶ Indeed, the fool’s entire being is the source of mindless ideas about god that lead to depravity.¹⁴⁷ In 14.245-247, Porphyry offers an effective summary of this person’s existence: he is greedy and unjust, irreverent towards god and parents, and immoral towards everyone else.

¹³⁶ Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 19.310-316: “And it is not by doing certain things or forming certain opinions about god that we worship him properly. Tears and supplications do not move god...Rather the god-filled intellect, firmly established, is united to God, for like must gravitate to like.”

¹³⁷ Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 13.226-231, 236-237, 14.242-245.

¹³⁸ Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 11.201-202, 13.227-231, 15.261, 21.331-339.

¹³⁹ Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 12.206-209, 13.225-226, 16.271-273, 17.288-291, 18.300-304, 22.348-360, 24.373-374.

¹⁴⁰ Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 23.360 ff.

¹⁴¹ Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 16.279-17.284, 19.312-317, 24.374-376.

¹⁴² Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 23.362-364.

¹⁴³ Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 14.247-250; cf. Pötscher, *Porphyrios*, 82-83.

¹⁴⁴ Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 17.281-285, 291-292, 18.300-301, 304-308, cf. 27.425-438, 31.479-483.

¹⁴⁵ Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 15.250-265.

¹⁴⁶ Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 12.212.

¹⁴⁷ Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 22.352-360.

Our third illustration comes from Pseudo-Heraclitus, *Epistle* 4.¹⁴⁸ Here the sage, in a letter to his friend, the famous Ephesian legislator Hermodorus,¹⁴⁹ responds to charges of impiety leveled at him by a certain Euthycles. This fictional defense creates for the epistolographer, writing perhaps during the first century AD, a forum by which he or she can educate the readership in a paraenetic context about religion. Heraclitus' response to the charges of Euthycles consists of a rather intense condemnation (evidencing a Cynic flavor) of those who support the city's temple-system with its cult of images, balanced by positive statements as to the author's own theological position, formulated according to philosophic categories.¹⁵⁰ These two positions are antithetically conceived, according to the text representing the exact opposite of one another (4.1). The linchpin of the overall argument in this setting consists of the repeated contrast drawn between the impiety and ignorance of Euthycles and the citizens of Ephesus, on one hand, and the piety and *paideia* of Heraclitus, on the other.

As for the former, Heraclitus' detractors are declared to be ignorant and crude in their theological assumptions. In their delusion, Euthycles and the Ephesians vainly want to apply human standards to their appropriation of the divine, unaware of who and where god actually is, and unwilling to learn the truth. They are deceived into thinking that god is somehow locked-up in dark temples, residing in altars and in stone images constructed by human hands (χειρόκμητος) and sitting on pedestals.¹⁵¹ Their inability to grasp basic principles about divinity hampers them from rooting out their own moral faults and makes it impossible for them to discern genuine godliness in others. Heraclitus relates the ignorance and impiety of the Ephesians to their many vices and misdeeds, the chief of which seems to be the act of passing judgment on him, of all people, as impious. In this they are slandering wisdom (σοφίαν ὑβρίζοντες), attributing their own sins to the one who is preeminent in knowledge and virtue.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ On this text see Rudolfo Mondolfo and Leonardo Tarán, *Eraclito, Testimonianze e Imitazioni* (Biblioteca di Studi Superiori 59; Florence: "La Nuova Italia," 1972) 315-322; Malherbe, *Cynic Epistles*, 22-26, 190-193.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Pseudo-Heraclitus, *Epistulae* 7.1, 8.1, 9.1.

¹⁵⁰ Abraham J. Malherbe, "Pseudo-Heraclitus, Epistle 4: The Divinization of the Wise Man," *JAC* 21 (1978) 42-64; for the Cynic influence on the philosophic critique of superstition cf. Walter Abernethy, *De Plutarchi qui Fertur de Superstitione Libello* (Königsberg: Itartung, 1911) 71-100.

¹⁵¹ Esp. Pseudo-Heraclitus, *Epistulae* 4.2, 5.

¹⁵² Esp. Pseudo-Heraclitus, *Epistulae* 4.1, 4.

For his part, Heraclitus maintains that the entire cosmos is god's temple. The magnificence of the divine, he says, is not to be observed in hand-made idols, but in the whole heavens and earth, the plants, the animals, the sun and the stars.¹⁵³ As Harold Attridge observes, this positively oriented component of the letter represents a formulation of piety that was widespread in intellectual circles of the Hellenistic era. At the basis of such formulations "lie traditional arguments of natural theology which were the common possession of almost every variety of philosopher in this period."¹⁵⁴ Because (according to the letter) Heraclitus alone has the correct perception of god in accordance with these arguments, he alone is pious, he alone knows god, and on account of this *paideia* Heraclitus possesses true virtues. In his philosophic *ἀγών* he has overcome the love of pleasure, wealth, and ambition. He is devoid of cowardice, fear, grief, or anger.¹⁵⁵ This moral superiority, likened to that of the deified Heracles, proves his piety and his wisdom, while demonstrating the depravity of his accusers and the irony of their accusation.

Our final example is one of the *Epistulae Morales* of Seneca. Scholars of ancient ethics have long recognized in *Epistle* 95, together with its counterpart *Epistle* 94, an invaluable resource for distinguishing the cardinal properties of paraenesis and its function in philosophic education.¹⁵⁶ In *Epistle* 95, Seneca hopes to demonstrate that it is not enough for philosophy as a pedagogical enterprise to supply for its adherents moral precepts, exhortation as to how they should comport themselves in definite circumstances or stations of life. It must additionally investigate and contemplate the universe, expounding doctrines that forge a comprehensive explanation of reality.¹⁵⁷ These doctrines expel the deep-seated fears and detrimental opinions of novices, helping them to discern good and evil, and laying a foundation for the cultivation of virtue.¹⁵⁸ By means of doctrinal instruction, says Seneca, students obtain a vision of the whole of

¹⁵³ On this sort of cosmic piety of contemplation cf. Arthur S. Pease, "Caeli Enarrant," *HTR* 34 (1941) 163-200; André-Jean Festugière, *Personal Religion among the Greeks* (Sather Classical Lectures 26; Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954) 105-121; Jean Pépin, "Cosmic Piety," in Armstrong, *Spirituality*, 408-435.

¹⁵⁴ Harold W. Attridge, *First-Century Cynicism in the Epistles of Heraclitus* (HTS 29; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976) 22, cf. 13-23.

¹⁵⁵ Pseudo-Heraclitus, *Epistulae* 4.3.

¹⁵⁶ Dill, *Roman Society*, 305 ff.; Cancik, *Untersuchungen*, 42-45; Hadot, *Seneca*, 7-9, 99; I.G. Kidd, "Moral Actions and Rules in Stoic Ethics," *The Stoics* (ed. John M. Rist; Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978) 247-258.

¹⁵⁷ Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 95.10-12.

¹⁵⁸ Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 95.34-35, 37.

existence and are encouraged to establish their own fundamental goals, ideals, and commitments. This, then, provides the effective context and rationale for obeying practical moral precepts.¹⁵⁹

Given the basic characteristics of philosophic guidance according to this description, it is requisite for the Senecan model that both doctrines and precepts be theological in their bearing, the former explaining the nature of the gods, the latter how they ought to be worshipped. As the discussion in 95.47-49 illustrates, Seneca presupposes the primacy of religious topics in paraenetic instruction; he also assumes that such instruction will be carried out antithetically. The content of the negative instruction, warnings as to what should be avoided, is familiar from the philosophic critique of superstition, as the master provides some examples of religious precepts informed by his Stoic worldview:

Let us forbid lamps to be lighted on the Sabbath,
he writes,

since the gods do not need light, neither do men take pleasure in soot. Let us forbid men to offer morning salutation and to throng the doors of temples; mortal ambitions are attracted by such ceremonies, but god is worshipped by those who truly know Him. Let us forbid bringing towels and flesh-scrapers to Jupiter, and proffering mirrors to Juno; for god seeks no servants. Of course not; he himself does service to mankind, everywhere and to all he is at hand to help. Although a man hear what limit he should observe in sacrifice, and how far he should recoil from burdensome superstitions, he will never make sufficient progress until he has conceived a right idea of god – regarding Him as one who possesses all things, and allots all things, and bestows them without price.

At the heart of superstition, according to Seneca's interpretation, is a deficient idea of god's character and an incorrect notion of what worthy service to god consists. These problems arise from the misapplication of human categories of ignorance and weakness to the deity. Superstitious practices, such as those associated with Sabbath observance, are censured in part because their standards are deemed to be purely human in character; they demonstrate an over-concern with worldly appearances, feeding human pride.¹⁶⁰ Like other paraenetic writers, though, Seneca's instructional approach mixes positive with negative elements. The sage goes on (in § 50) to accentuate the

¹⁵⁹ Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 95.38-39, 43-46.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Robert Turcan, *Sénèque et les Religions Orientales* (Collection Latomus 91; Bruxelles: Latomus, 1967) 21-24, 29-35.

hegemony and majesty of the gods, the beneficence and complete goodness of their bearing towards the human race. This assessment contrasts positively with the debased rituals and religious orientation that are critiqued, inspiring a revised model for comprehending the divine and for service to the divine.

Polemic and Correction in Colossians

Like Seneca, the author of Colossians endeavors to construct a cogent paraenetic message that tends both to doctrinal concerns of universal relevance and to specific issues that matter to the readers' moral future. The former aids the recipients in constructing for themselves a sound ideational foundation on the basis of which they may overcome obstacles and grow as Christians, visualizing clearly their ultimate goals. The latter imparts concrete directions as to how they should actualize their beliefs in word and deed, as their decision-making abilities mature in relation to their particular roles and situations in life. Also like Seneca (and many other ancient ethicists), our letter-writer casts these doctrinal statements and moral precepts in an antithetical frame, indicating what is acceptable from the standpoint of Pauline ideology and what is not, and suggesting the criteria by which such determinations are made. In a manner consistent with ancient paraenetic practice, then, the authentic Christian life is portrayed in both positive and negative terms.

As befits the epistle's historical situation, the primary target of the author's condemnatory speech is the Colossian philosophy, its religious teachings and regimen. In keeping with its paraenetic style, though, the text's polemical statements are not directed so much against the philosophy itself as they are intended for the correction and education of the readers. In Chapter One, I surveyed what the author has to say about the errorists, indicating some of the options available to modern interpreters as to their identity. My purpose here is not to repeat that discussion, but to point out how the letter-writer's strategies for characterizing the opposition and delineating for his readers the threat which they pose compare with the conventions of philosophic paraenesis. Our author, like any paraenetic writer, is hardly interested in providing a balanced and fair estimation of the oppositional position, but earnestly seeks to warn the recipients, rooting out dangerous ideas and leading them to healthy opinions. Inasmuch as paraenetic philosophers aim for comparable objectives in their polemical practices, we should anticipate certain similarities of language, ideas, and tactics to emerge from a comparative analysis.

A few preliminary observations are in order before proceeding to describe the principal categories of critique and correction found in the letter. First, while the substance of the author's refutation interacts predominantly with certain tenets of the Colossian philosophy and those who espouse these tenets, it takes into view also a critical judgment regarding the moral fabric and orientation of the larger, outside world, of all human society outside the church. In fact, the letter-writer's censure of the false teaching needs to be interpreted within the context of this broader negative evaluation.¹⁶¹ Critique of the sort we encounter especially in Colossians 1.21, 3.5-7, and 4.5¹⁶² is compatible by and large with both Jewish and Christian traditions in antiquity of castigating what Paul refers to in 4.5 as οἱ ἑξῶ, "the outsiders."¹⁶³ Consideration of this sphere of moral, religious, and cultural existence is of importance to the author since the readers, as former pagans, originated from this non-Christian world and it continues to influence their lives in significant ways. The author reminds the audience of its former pagan status in order to dramatize what conversion to Christianity has accomplished. This functions also to alert the Colossians about the dangers that their previous mode of existence, their "old human being," may still present for their commitment to Christ. Paul characterizes the outside world as a realm of spiritual darkness and moral filth, where unbelievers are mired in a state of estrangement, engaging in evil works that offend God and harm others. The readers once conducted themselves in such vices: now, towards those who continue to live that way they must conduct themselves in God's wisdom (that is, in knowledge of God's will), "making the most of the time" (3.7, 4.5).¹⁶⁴ Here, as elsewhere in the New Testament, the anticipated reaction of outsiders to the conduct of church-members is to play a role in shaping Christian self-understanding and moral purpose.¹⁶⁵

Second, the overall setting and basic character of the author's correctional response ought to be kept in mind as we examine those

¹⁶¹ Cf. Meeks, "In One Body," 213.

¹⁶² Cf. Colossians 1.13, 3.11.

¹⁶³ On those "outside" cf. Mark 4.11, I Corinthians 5.12-13, I Thessalonians 4.12, I Timothy 3.7, Revelation 22.15, also cf. I Corinthians 10.32-33, Philippians 2.14-15, 4.5, I Peter 2.12, 3.16; Str-B 3.362; *TDNT* 2.575-576; BAGD 279. Cf. Werner Foerster, "Die Irrlehrer des Kolosserbriefes," *Studia Biblica et Semitica: Prof. Th. C. Vriezen dedicata* (Wageningen: Veenman & Zonen, 1966) 71-80.

¹⁶⁴ This suggests for the community the possibility of an indirect missionary function, esp. coming on the heels of 4.3-4; cf. Pokorny, *Colossians*, 186-187; also Ephesians 5.16.

¹⁶⁵ Willem C. van Unnik, "Die Rücksicht auf die Reaktion der Nicht-Christen als Motiv in der altchristlichen Paränese," *Sparsa Collecta: The Collected Essays of Willem C. van Unnik* (NovTSup 29-31; 3 vols.; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973, 1980, 1983) 2.307-322.

segments of the text that directly critique the false teaching. Colossians can hardly be classified as a polemical letter. Rather, the manner of Paul's response to the dilemma that troubled these congregations is predominantly positive and expositional, even when he appears to be speaking directly to opposing positions, for example, Colossians 2.9-15.¹⁶⁶ What we could fairly label a refutation, in fact, constitutes a relatively minor portion of the letter (2.4, 8, 16-23), even while the epistle as a whole can be described as a response to the situation created by a rival movement's influence in the Lycus River valley. Similarly, the epistle's statements regarding the status and mission of the apostle (1.24 ff.) seem to be more in the nature of a self-commendation intended to reassure the audience than a defense against specific and personal oppositional charges.¹⁶⁷

Third, and also in keeping with the letter's strategy in responding to the false teaching, the author relegates the antagonists themselves (as third-person characters of the epistolary exchange) to a minor and anonymous role. The letter-writer never expressly identifies the proponents of the philosophy, but only alludes to a certain *μηδεὶς* or *τις* whose opinions are to be disregarded.¹⁶⁸ By and large, the author exhibits more interest in the erroneous teachings and in the detrimental effect they are having on Christian faith than on the personalities of those who propagate these teachings. We can probably assume that the rival figures involved were already well-known to both the pseudepigrapher and the intended audience, rendering any extended description superfluous. Perhaps we can assume, too, that the author hesitated to name any of the opponents individually since to do so might betray the text's post-Pauline origin.

Turning now to an examination of the parameters that appear to govern the author's manner of correction and refutation, three broad and interrelated categories of critique emerge. First, the writer wants to attribute to the errorists mistaken suppositions regarding the nature of the divine and the nature of the relationship between the divine realm and that of human affairs. Second, he castigates their faulty convictions as to the character of worship and the general intention of religious rites and practices. Third, we detect a negative judgment of the harmful ramifications that these ideas have for the morality of the saints and the harmony of the Christian community. These three categories of critique can be inspected individually and in greater detail.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Gewiss, "Die apologetische Methode," 258-269; Lähnemann, *Kolosserbrief*, 115-136; Zeilinger, *Erstgeborene*, 137-177.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Lyons, *Autobiography*, 170-176, 223-227, and *passim*.

¹⁶⁸ Wolter, *Brief*, 163.

I. As we have seen, at the heart of the dispute addressed by the epistle lies a significant difference of opinion regarding christology, specifically as to the proper soteriological interpretation of the Christ-event. Essential to the argument of the letter in responding to the dispute are its contentions regarding the complete supremacy of Christ in the universe and the complete sufficiency of salvation realized by those who are in Christ (through baptism). The failure of the errorists to grasp the dramatic implications of this christological affirmation is the source of their inferior and degenerate theology. They have failed to acknowledge the lordship of Christ in its full sense and to recognize the new reality inaugurated by God through Christ's death and resurrection. This failure is coupled with the mistake of assigning supernatural power and religious significance to quasi-divine beings who play no meaningful part in an authentic Christian worldview. The author refers to these entities as thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, the elements of the world, and angels. Without denying their existence, he censures the cosmology of the philosophy for assigning to these beings influence either in heaven or on earth. In contrast to the array of divine forces that demonize the universe of the errorists, imposing various regulations on humankind, that letter-writer stresses the unity of God's self and God's purpose, asserting an everlasting and universal reality: there is only one God and the fullness of deity dwells only in Christ. The beings venerated by the errorists belong only to the created order of things, which was made by God in, through, and for Christ.¹⁶⁹ Any authority that they may have exercised over human life and destiny has been stripped away by God through Christ. Their continued influence is a matter only of human ignorance and faithlessness. This fact is conveyed most vividly in 2.13c-15, which stands at the center of the epistle's critique of the philosophy. The traditional formulation shows that any barriers that might have excluded the Colossians from full membership in God's family have been obliterated by the cross. Specifically, when God removed the *χειρόγραφον* "that was against us...and opposed to us" the faithful received in Christ the forgiveness of sins (cf. 1.14). The cosmic powers, which apparently

¹⁶⁹ Most likely, *στοιχεῖα* refers primarily to the four or five physical substances out of which the universe was thought to be made; in addition to the commentaries see Dietrich Rusam, "Neue Belege zu den *στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου* (Gal 4,3.9; Kol 2,8.20)," *ZNW* 83 (1992) 119-125. In its Pauline usage, the term may be indebted to Jewish apologetic traditions with their critique of idolatry (e.g., Wisdom of Solomon 13.2-3; Philo, *De Vita Contemplativa* 3-5), in which case its application to the system of the Colossian errorists, who saw themselves as upholding Jewish customs, would be particularly damning; cf. Kehl, *Christushymnus*, 138-161.

relied on this situation of human transgression as their means of control, are therefore incapacitated, driven before God in humiliating procession.

The author, then, assumes a critical stance regarding the errorists' interpretation of the fundamental relationship that is operative between the readers and the forces of the divine realm. In the construct of the philosophy, the principalities and powers are hostile, or at least indifferent, to the human condition, requiring δόγματα, demanding veneration, and blocking access to the divine realm. In this state of affairs, the proper human response is one of servility and fear directed towards the supernatural entities, a religious posture which the errorists apparently designated ταπεινοφροσύνη.¹⁷⁰ Given the strong biblical foundation for the positive application of this term, as well as its positive usage in early Christian circles, it would appear unlikely that the letter-writer has selected it as a derogatory label.¹⁷¹ Instead, the errorists probably advocated the term as part of their self-description and, as comparison with Colossians 3.12 suggests, the interpretation of this concept's place in Christian religion is included in the debate that prompted the writing of the letter.¹⁷² In the author's thinking, ταπεινοφροσύνη functions principally in a moral context, signifying the virtue of humility that is to characterize relations within the church. The literary setting of 3.12-15b indicates its ideational connection with acts of compassion, kindness, forgiveness, love, and peacefulness, acts that respond to God's call and manifest Christ's presence in the community. By contrast, the author attacks the opposition's interpretation of ταπεινοφροσύνη, which he associates with their self-abasement and false humility, as well as with their cultic and ascetic practices.¹⁷³ In this polemical context, the term represents a needless fear and harmful docility before the supernatural, a servile demeanor towards and dependence on intermediary beings.¹⁷⁴ In response, the letter-writer argues that the realm of the divine is not to be feared. God, the source only of goodness and salvation, has overcome the harmful power of the *stoicheia* through

¹⁷⁰ In the New Testament cf. Acts 20.19, Ephesians 4.2, Philippians 2.3, I Peter 5.5. Further, Willem den Boer, "Tapeinos in Pagan and Christian Terminology," *Tria Corda: Scritti in Onore di Arnaldo Momigliano* (ed. Emilio Gabba; Como: Edizioni New Press, 1983) 143-162; Meeks, "To Walk Worthily," 56-57, n. 24.

¹⁷¹ In which case it would approximate its general pagan usage, as in Epictetus, *Diatribae* 3.2.14, 3.24.56, 4.1.2, etc.

¹⁷² Lohse, *Colossians*, 188, n. 32; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 142; Schweizer, *Colossians*, 158-159; Pokorny, *Colossians*, 146.

¹⁷³ On the connection between ταπεινοφροσύνη and asceticism see above, p. 31, n. 65.

¹⁷⁴ Gnlika, *Kolossierbrief*, 149; Barth, *Colossians*, 343-344.

Christ. Proper religion is grounded in thanksgiving to God and in moral conduct that is worthy of God and of the new human being that God has fashioned in accordance with Christ.

II. The conception of the divine realm embraced by the proponents of the philosophy and the stance that they assumed towards the supernatural provided guiding principles for their religious practices and encratite regimen, which the author also condemns as mendacious and unchristian. Judging from the evidence of the letter, the content of the false religion included the observance of particular regulations intended to subdue the flesh, including abstinence from certain food and drink, and perhaps also some rite they presented as "circumcision." Their religious arrangements also urged the observance of Jewish holy days – "festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths" – and may have incorporated certain purificatory lustrations.¹⁷⁵ By satisfying the requirements of this devotional system, the errorists believed that they venerated the powers and principalities, acknowledging their indebtedness to them, and thereby securing visions and access to supernatural wisdom. Paul repudiates both these practices and the intent that stands behind them by revealing for the audience the contradictions that plague this system in light of the new realities rendered by God through Christ. These new realities are affirmed throughout chapters one and two of the letter, as the author brings to bear traditions of the church that express the victory of Christ over the cosmic powers and that articulate how Christians like the readers themselves have come to participate in this victory.

Thus at the heart of the author's response is an appeal to Christian tradition as a means of demonstrating the errors of the philosophy and leading the readers to the truth. The Christ-hymn of 1.15-20 stands as the most significant (though not the only) element of this tradition deemed relevant to the case. Such traditional materials are presented as a manifestation of the divine mystery, validated by the authority of the apostle. Underlying the author's argument is the contention that the opposition has either neglected, misinterpreted, or misused these traditions. As these traditions affirm, and as the author interprets them, Christ is indeed preeminent in all things according to God's will, the head of every principality and power (1.18, 2.10). That which does not hold fast to the head, then, has no substance or value, but merely shadows divine reality (2.17, 19, 23).¹⁷⁶ This casti-

¹⁷⁵ Cf. above, pp. 29-32.

¹⁷⁶ For "shadow" in 2.17 cf. Hebrews 10.1; Philo, *Legum Allegoriae* 3.96, *De Migratione Abrahami* 12, *De Posteritate Caini* 112; *TDNT* 7.394-398; Zeilinger, *Erstgeborene*, 160-161.

gation applies in particular to the δόγματα of the philosophy, which belong to the transitory order of things, the created order of human senses and standards, which has only the appearance of ultimate truth (cf. Hebrews 9.9-10). Since all the treasures associated with divine wisdom are hidden in Christ, any source of knowledge that lies outside the sphere of Christ, such as those sought out by the errorists in their visions, is rendered insignificant and vain (2.2-4). The full appropriation of God's will for human life is realized among the Colossians solely in their "receiving" Christ as their Lord, just as they were instructed by Epaphras, in accordance with the Pauline gospel (2.6-7).

The encratite regimen and mystical experiences of the philosophy's adherents, directed as they are towards the created world and intermediary beings, do not edify the church, the body of Christ, or nurture its spiritual growth, but in fact constitute a denial of what God has accomplished for those who are called. The source and standard of their religion are not God's will, the mystery revealed by the apostle, but rather the depraved and limited opinions of human beings. The philosophy, says Paul, is not κατὰ Χριστόν (despite any claims it may make to the contrary), but is instead κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων (2.8).¹⁷⁷ The theories and customs of the errorists deviate from the apostolic tradition – they are not in accordance with faith in Christ Jesus as Lord, the sort of faith embodied in the gospel (1.3-5), but in fact undermine such faith and the good order that flows from it (2.5-7). Since its "tradition" is educed from human principles, the philosophy's regulations pertaining to religious observance are only κατὰ τὰ ἐντάλματα καὶ διδασκαλίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων (2.22).¹⁷⁸ Such ordinances are a human fabrication, feeding human desires, and the manner of life they inform conflicts with the commandment of God.

Since the religion of the errorists is not determined by God, not in accordance with the mystery that had been hidden for ages and maintained by the divinely-appointed leaders of the church, it is only self-chosen, as it were. This appears to be the underlying insinuation that guides the author's use of the θελ stem in 2.18 (θέλων ἐν...

¹⁷⁷ For Colossians 2.8 cf. Mark 7.8-9 par. (and the next note), I Peter 1.18. On παράδοσις see Lohse, *Colossians*, 95-96; Wegenast, *Verständnis*, 123-126; *TDNT* 2.169-173, 9.186; Spicq, *Lexicon*, 3.16-19. The term is most likely part of the philosophy's self-description, intended to highlight the antiquity and revelational character of its teachings.

¹⁷⁸ For Colossians 2.22 cf. Isaiah 29.13 LXX, Mark 7.7 par., Ephesians 4.14, I Timothy 4.1, Titus 1.14. O'Brien (*Colossians*, 151; cf. *TDNT* 2.161-163) notes that the plural διδασκαλίας in the LXX "suggests a multiplicity of human teachings that lay no claim to absoluteness."

θηρκεία τῶν ἀγγέλων) and 2.23 (ἐθελοθηρκία).¹⁷⁹ Even if such expressions may have originated with the philosophy itself, in the letter-writer's interpretation any sense of free and purely personal choice on the part of the errorists as to the deity one ought to worship or as to the manner of worship is an illusion. It is not the individual's will that decides ultimate realities and ultimate commitments in life, but obedience to the will of God (cf. 1.9, 4.12).¹⁸⁰ Perhaps most offensive to Paul is the false humility and arrogance associated with this spiritual attitude of the opposition. These worshippers "delight in"¹⁸¹ such servility and self-abasement. While this variety of mysticism may be the source of the movement's "reputation" (λόγος) for wisdom, it represents nothing more than the self-seeking basis upon which its members vainly judge and disqualify others.

The nature of the author's interaction with the philosophy in chapter 2 reveals also a debate over the interpretation of Christian ritual. Harold Attridge has correctly argued that the letter to the Colossians wants to reject a wayward view or version of baptismal practice among the errorists, which apparently had little to do with Christ. This would explain the emphasis evident in 2.11-13, which comes in the midst of a section where the author is busy correcting the ideas of the philosophy.¹⁸² As Christians, says Paul, the Colossians have been the beneficiaries of the true and ultimate baptism, which is described as the circumcision of Christ. This circumcision is divine in nature; it is "accomplished without (human) hands" (ἀχειροποιήτος) in the putting off of the body of the flesh (2.11, cf. 3.9). In this rite they have been buried with Christ, they have died and have risen with Christ. There is no further need, then, to submit to "circumcision" accomplished by human means or to any other form or interpretation of baptism (2.11-12, cf. 3.11).¹⁸³ Any spiritual

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Lähnemann, *Kolossenerbrief*, 139.

¹⁸⁰ Pokorny, *Colossians*, 156; cf. on θέλων BDF § 148.2; cf. on ἐθελοθηρκία BDF § 118.2; Francis, "Humility," 181-182. On ἐθελοθηρκία and *superstitio* cf. Grodzynski, "Superstitio," 49. We could also compare this with the boast of the Greco-Roman philosopher to be αὐτοδιδάκτος or αὐτουργός τῆς φιλοσοφίας, for which see Malherbe, "Exhortation," 253.

¹⁸¹ In addition to the commentaries see *TDNT* 3.45; BAGD 355; Percy, *Probleme*, 145-147.

¹⁸² Harold W. Attridge, "On Becoming an Angel: Rival Baptismal Theologies at Colossae," *Religious Propaganda and Missionary Competition in the New Testament World: Essays Honoring Dieter Georgi* (ed. Lukas Bormann, et al.; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994) 481-498; he understands the rival baptismal theology to be "proto-Gnostic" in some sense. On the importance of baptismal rites for the Elchasaites see above, p. 37.

¹⁸³ The implication is that Colossians opposes a circumcision that is deemed to be χειροποιήτος, that is, human, and thus temporary, incomplete, and even idolatrous;

significance possessed by the opposition's "manuscript" (χειρόγρα-φον) for religious practice has been nullified. Since Christ in his victory has overcome all divisions among humanity, special rites and practices which formerly distinguished one group from another have lost their significance. In Christ all who have been baptized have been "filled," eliminating any other basis for elitist aspiration, for passing judgment on others, or for excluding them.

Through baptism, says Paul, the Colossians have died with Christ from the power of the elements of the world. It is therefore inconceivable that they should submit to regulations associated with the *stoicheia* "as though still in the world,"¹⁸⁴ as though still mired in the realm of the flesh, allowing the norms of the created order to determine one's moral course (2.20). The author cautions the readers not to acknowledge the binding power of the regulations; otherwise they will revert to the condition of slavery that vexed their previous status. Having been raised with Christ, their lives are to be oriented not towards the things that are on the earth, that are worldly in nature, but towards that which is above, where Christ sits at God's right hand.

The regulations of the false teachers, such as "don't handle, don't taste, don't touch," belong to this transitory, earthly world. As the letter-writer puts it in 2.22, these sorts of regulations "are all destined for destruction as they are used in accordance with the ordinances and teachings" of the philosophy.¹⁸⁵ It appears that for the author, the ascetic rules in and of themselves are not objectionable (possibly they are biblical in origin), but they become objectionable when their application to human conduct is abused by a manner of religious observance that is not Christ-centered, but is instead dictated by human vanity.¹⁸⁶ Issues of abstinence for religious purposes must not become the basis for condemning others in the community.¹⁸⁷ Since the authority that the cosmic powers had over against humanity has been nullified by Christ and all the transgressions of those in

cf. Ephesians 2.11; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 115-116; Barth, *Colossians*, 317.

¹⁸⁴ κόσμος here refers either directly to the *stoicheia* or to the whole human sphere of activity and concern.

¹⁸⁵ Literally, "are all destined for destruction with use in accordance with the ordinances and teachings;" for the translation see Barth, *Colossians*, 357-358. In this case ἀπόχρησις means not simply "use" but "misuse" or "abuse;" cf. BAGD 102. The use of δογματίζεσθε in 2.20 suggests that the subject of this phrase (the ἅ of 2.22) is the regulations themselves, and not the perishable substances to which they refer.

¹⁸⁶ The concern Colossians demonstrates for moral purity and unity (e.g., in 3.5-15) contrasts with the errorists' (apparent) preoccupation with physical purity and spiritual competition.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Romans 14.17, I Corinthians 6.13.

Christ have been forgiven by God, the readers' problem of indebtedness no longer exists. They should not, therefore, allow themselves to be judged according to regulations supposedly imposed by these powers, regulations that dictate the observance of certain holy days or certain ascetic practices.

III. The antidote to this misconception is the lordship of Christ, which, as depicted in Colossians, eliminates any human basis for elitist aspirations. All who have been filled in Christ (2.10) are united to one another in Christ, united in obedience to Christ, eradicating distinctions that formerly divided people (3.11). The church lives as one body, in peace, love, and forgiveness (3.13-15). The author reprimands the philosophy for its preoccupation with individual accomplishment and special knowledge, pointing out the strife, condemnations, and fractiousness it breeds in the community. The oppositional claims are not matched by what is known of ultimate reality in accordance with divine wisdom, nor are they matched by the actions of the individuals who advance them. The author counters with teaching as to the truth revealed by God and with a strong moral message, in which Paul himself emerges as an embodiment of the godly life.

The pseudepigrapher attacks the divisiveness and moral turpitude of the adversaries on a number of fronts. To begin with, he cautions the audience regarding the deceptive speech of the opposition. This concern surfaces most precisely in 2.4. Paul has written this letter to the Colossians, assuring them of the richness and wisdom of the gospel, in order that "no one may delude you with beguiling speech" (μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς παραλογίζεται ἐν πηθανολογίᾳ).¹⁸⁸ Here the lines of battle are drawn clearly. As the statement's context indicates, the philosophy's false rhetoric not only threatens to lead the faithful astray from the divine mystery, but it also undermines the good order and firmness of Christian faith that the community ought to enjoy (2.5).¹⁸⁹ The author concedes that the errorists' speech has the power to persuade, yet this speech can lay no claim to the truth, no claim to di-

¹⁸⁸ On παραλογίζεσθαι cf. James 1.22; BAGD 620; LSJ 1317; Lohse, *Colossians*, 83, n. 121 (who refers to Epictetus, *Diatribae* 2.20.7: ἐξαπατῶσιν...παραλογίζονται). πηθανολογία is the art of persuasion, here given a negative twist: their words are high-sounding and the manner of presentation renders their ideas plausible, though they are in fact deceitful (cf. Epictetus, *Diatribae* 1.8.7, cited above); cf. Lohse, *Colossians*, 83, n. 120; LSJ 1403.

¹⁸⁹ For the rebuke of "persuasive words" cf. Romans 16.18, I Corinthians 2.4-5; this represents a meaningful topic for Pauline theology, esp. in a paraenetic mode; cf. Hans Dieter Betz, "The Problem of Rhetoric and Theology according to the Apostle Paul," *L'Apôtre Paul: Personnalité, Style et Conception du Ministère* (ed. Albert Vanhoye; BETL 73; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1986) 16-48.

vine wisdom. The rules and teachings of the opponents possess merely the λόγος, the reputation, of σοφία (2.23).¹⁹⁰ Regardless of any assertions made for them, the devotional practices they advocate "are of no value whatsoever" (οὐκ ἐν τιμῇ τινι).¹⁹¹ Moreover, in reality (and ironically) the result of these practices is nothing but "the gratification of the flesh" (πλησμονὴ τῆς σαρκός).¹⁹² All in all, despite the rival movement's self-designation as a φιλοσοφία, it is merely a λογοσοφία (to coin a term), a façade of divine wisdom that exists in human discourse only.¹⁹³

Consequently, anyone who participates in the self-abasement and mystical experiences associated with the philosophy deceives himself. He is "puffed up without cause by his fleshly mind" (2.18).¹⁹⁴ This person's noetic orientation is not spiritual (cf. 3.2) but sensuous and materialistic in nature. Being "puffed up," particularly in its Pauline usage, relates to conceit, arrogance, and boasting, vices that plague interpersonal relations.¹⁹⁵ The one whose mental abilities and intellectual energies belong to this world, the realm of darkness, of the old human being at odds with God, relies on himself and his own accomplishments and not on God. He becomes self-absorbed and self-important, set apart from Christ and Christ's body.

The errorists, then, feel themselves to be in a position where they can condemn others on the basis of a sort of elitism and egoism that stems from their religious standards. We can assume that this condemnation was directed primarily at those who did not participate in the cult, regimen, and esoteric knowledge of the philosophy as a way of pressuring them to conform to its teachings (cf. 2.8, 16, 18). Paul warns the readers about these self-appointed judges who seek to impose their will on others. The Colossians ought not to allow anyone

¹⁹⁰ On λόγος as "semblance, name, rumor, appearance" see LSJ 1058-1059 (s.v. λόγος VI.2). On the antithesis of λόγος and ἀλήθεια cf. Schweizer, *Colossians*, 168. On the possible Jewish character of the charge cf. Zeilinger, *Erstgeborene*, 128-129.

¹⁹¹ In addition to the commentaries see BAGD 817; *EDNT* 3.359.

¹⁹² For the translation see Lohse, *Colossians*, 127; O'Brien, *Colossians*, 154-155; Barth, *Colossians*, 358-362. The language of 2.23, unfortunately, offers no straightforward interpretation; for the issues involved cf. Bo Reicke, "Zum sprachlichen Verständnis von Kol. 2.23," *ST* 6 (1952) 39-53; Bernhard Hansler, "Zu Satzkonstruktion und Aussage in Kol 2, 23," *Wort Gottes in der Zeit: Festschrift für Karl Hermann Schelkle zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Helmut Feld and Josef Nolte; Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1973) 143-148; Bruce Hollenbach, "Col. II.23: Which Things Lead to Fulfillment of the Flesh," *NTS* 25 (1978-79) 254-261.

¹⁹³ Cf. Philostratus' critique of the δοκησίσοφος in *Vita Apollonii* 4.30; also οἰησισόφος in Apollonius, *Epistulae* 43.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Romans 8.7; cf. above, n. 105.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. I Corinthians 4.6, 18, 19, 5.2, 8.1, 13.4, II Corinthians 12.20. The opposite of this is *agape* (I Corinthians 8.1, 13.4), which builds up the church and its members (Colossians 3.14). Cf. Mitchell, *Paul*, 95.

to judge (κρίνέτω) them in such matters of ascetic or calendrical observance. They should not let anyone disqualify (καταβραβεύέτω) them on account of visionary experiences or religious self-abasement.¹⁹⁶ Instead, they should allow the peace that Christ has wrought in the world (cf. 1.2, 20) to adjudicate (βραβεύέτω) in their hearts (3.15, cf. Philippians 4.7).¹⁹⁷ God's peacemaking through Christ, not any human achievement, is to be the standard of judgment in all facets of human activity.¹⁹⁸

Similarly, in 2.8 the letter-writer vividly exhorts the readers to beware lest someone, by means of philosophy and vain deceit, "robs" or "kidnaps" them (συλαγωγείν).¹⁹⁹ The imagery suggests both the gravity and the confrontational nature of the situation at hand. The false philosophy, says the author, is posed to ensnare the readers violently, subduing them in the same state of slavery from which they recently escaped, thanks to the mercy of God through Christ.²⁰⁰ The errorists seek to carry the Colossians off as prey, stealing not only their faith or their hope, but making off with their very selves.²⁰¹

The manner of this pillage also falls within the scope of the letter-writer's critique. The false movement does not articulate its beliefs by means of philosophy in the customary and normally positive connotation of the word, but is nothing more than sham wisdom, what the author calls in 2.8 κενὴ ἀπάτη ("vain deceit").²⁰² The author's intent in this description can be grasped most plainly when it is contrasted with what the epistle affirms regarding the Pauline gospel. The philosophy is worthless and empty, without content or effect, while the gospel expresses the fullness and the riches of God as it fills up those who are in Christ. The philosophy is a seductive deception, predicated upon the inferior revelation of *stoicheia* and the vanity of human beings, while the gospel manifests God's truth in its most perfect form, the mystery of Christ. All in all, the philosophy does

¹⁹⁶ καταβραβεύειν can suggest in this context "rob" or "deprive," and so connects in meaning with συλαγωγῶν in 2.8 (see below); cf. BAGD 409; MM 324. On κρίνειν cf. Romans 14.3-5, 10, 13, 22-23; BAGD 451-452.

¹⁹⁷ On βραβεύειν: BAGD 146; *TDNT* 1.637-639; *LSJ* 327.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Dietrich Wiederkehr, *Die Theologie der Berufung in den Paulusbriefen* (Studia Friburgensia, NF 36; Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag, 1963) 196.

¹⁹⁹ For the term cf. BAGD 776; MM 596; Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 178. As Lohse (*Colossians*, 94) puts it, "a word has been chosen that not only indicates seduction but also points to the evil intent of those who are trying to gain influence over the community."

²⁰⁰ The physical imagery, appropriate to the setting of the deportation of people, expresses the antithesis of 1.13, with its talk of "rescuing;" cf. Galatians 4.3; Barth, *Colossians*, 308.

²⁰¹ Cf. similar hostile imagery discussed above, pp. 156-157.

²⁰² Cf. above, p. 155, n. 94.

not lead to higher knowledge of the divine or to critical insight as to the human condition, nor does it lay open the path to virtue, which is realized only in the new human being that is formed in accordance with the image of God, Christ.

In conclusion, the major points of comparison between Paul's strategy in condemning the Colossian error and the approaches evident in the philosophic texts surveyed above in their critiques of various oppositional groups can be summarized as follows. In a manner familiar from the practices of moral philosophy, Paul:

- chides his opponents as pseudo-philosophers, individuals who possess an unearned and invalid reputation for wisdom predicated on self-serving claims; their teachings are worthless in the quest for authentic human existence, truth, and virtue.
- characterizes his opponents as charlatans who deceive others through beguiling though pernicious argumentation, which traps and "robs" the listener.
- characterizes his opponents as vain, "puffed-up," arrogant, and judgmental, and hence poor role-models for an ethic directed towards interpersonal respect, harmony, and responsibility; this evidences their preoccupation with worldly matters, driven by human conceptualities of status.
- argues that the opponents' religious beliefs are formed from false, merely "human" opinions which have no basis in bona fide revelation; the author counters with assertions regarding the source, transmission, and manifestations of true, heavenly wisdom.
- demonstrates how the religious understanding of the opposition displays an ignorance of the nature of God, particularly in an unwarranted apprehension regarding menacing divine entities and guilt about human offenses against these entities.
- complains that the opponents attach religious significance to aspects of life where it is inappropriate, even harmful; this problem manifests itself in their abstention from certain food and drink and their observance of certain holy days; in contrast, the letter-writer advocates the pursuit of a moral life based upon widely-accepted ideals for human thriving.
- points out how the beliefs and practices of the opponents depart from and corrupt the traditions essential to the readers' religion, traditions sanctioned and transmitted by recognized authorities; the errorists' position, then, undermines both these traditions and the stability of the community; in response, the author issues instruction on the proper meaning of these traditions, including discussion of religious ritual and interpretation of hymnic materials.

These observations should not be construed as an argument that the author of Colossians relies entirely on formal tactics when interacting with the errorists, doing little to tailor his argument to the needs of the moment. On the contrary, the discussion here and in Chapter One indicates that in the letter's polemic there is sufficient detail to conclude both that the opposition is real and that reasonable hypotheses can be offered as to its historical identity based upon the reconstructed evidence. What these observations do suggest is that many of the categories and concerns included in Colossians' polemic are common to philosophic paraenesis and that the nature of the polemical section as a whole would be consistent with that manner of moral guidance. It is also plain that the inclusion of religious and theological topics in the critique is in keeping with the paraenetic style. Indeed, many of a paraenetic author's most weighty and positive statements regarding the religious beliefs of the recipients surface as he or she seeks to counter opposing views. In the next chapter we will learn with greater precision how the opposing views censured in Colossians figure into the broader paraenetic project of building and reinforcing the audience's worldview.

CHAPTER FIVE

GOD'S COSMIC VICTORY AND THE JOURNEY OF A COMMUNITY

For former pagans, who would have comprised most or all of our author's audience, conversion to Christianity must have entailed adopting a radically different worldview. We can assume, then, that the process of internalizing a distinctively Christian understanding of reality while separating from previous beliefs must have called for sustained work on behalf of initiates. The same could be said of those leaders in the church who took on the responsibility of indoctrinating and training initiates in the Christian life. As we learned in Chapters Two, Three, and Four, this process was associated with the production of paraenetic texts comparable to what we find in contemporaneous philosophic circles, where such materials were designed to assist neophytes in abstracting and affirming their new worldview in order that they might abide by their self-chosen course without wavering, and so ratify the movement's doctrines and goals in their own life-history.

The observation that the quandary which prompted the writing of Colossians can be interpreted in terms of the clash of two irreconcilable worldviews, that of the author and that of the philosophy, raises the possibility that those being addressed are, as a whole, still at a "liminal" stage in their development within the Christian movement. The opposition's teachings pose a threat to the members of the community in part because they have yet to assimilate fully the worldview which they originally endorsed at their conversion. This is the symbolic universe advanced by the letter and the theological affirmations it propounds, which are explicitly associated with the person and teachings of the individual who supervised the founding of their churches, the apostle Paul.¹ The author of Colossians is in apparent agreement with the Greco-Roman moralists of the time insofar as he demonstrates, at least in terms of tactics, an understanding that aspirants who are experiencing this sort of liminality are in need of two things. They must be vigilantly warned about the dangers of illegitimate worldviews that might undermine their progress, and they

¹ Cf. Meeks, "To Walk Worthily," 42-44.

must be reminded about the basic tenets and expectations of their own worldview so that they constantly bear them in mind. In a paraenetic context, both the warnings and the reminders are given with an eye to the students' palpable response, the ultimate verification of true progress. In this chapter we will tend to the substance of the worldview discernible in Colossians, to how the various elements of the epistle discussed so far fit together to form the letter-writer's particular version of the Christian story.

Mapping the Worldview of Colossians

Judging from the letter itself, the content and nature of the worldview to which the readers were introduced at the time of their conversion was in essence homologous with that of Pauline Christianity, familiar to us from the undisputed correspondence. At the same time, though, the author of Colossians emphasizes and develops certain aspects of this view owing to the circumstances at hand as well as his own particular interpretation of the Pauline gospel.² To begin with, we note that the letter projects an objective understanding of reality. The explanation presupposed here encompasses all the cosmos and all of history in terms of what is assumed to be a universally valid explanation of why and how all things exist or occur. Basic to this worldview is the distinction between two realms of reality (see particularly 1.16: "all things in the heavens and on the earth, things visible and invisible.")³

On one hand, the author assumes the existence of a divine, spiritual world, which is invisible. He conceives of the order of this reality in oppositional terms. Above all, there resides in a heavenly, spiritual kingdom God, Christ, and perhaps also God's angels (cf. "the saints in the light": 1.12, 18). The letter also makes reference to another group of divine or quasi-divine beings that, although part of God's creation and included in the spiritual world, are in some sense at odds with God and Christ insofar as they are in need of reconciliation with their creator.⁴ These are the cosmic rulers and authorities venerated by the opposition, which the author refers to disparagingly as the *stoicheia tou kosmou*.

On the other hand, the reader hears of the world of human experience, that which is visible and "under heaven" (1.23). The author

² On Paul's apocalyptic worldview see Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 164-192; idem, *Origins*, 61-65, 180-182; Becker, *Paul*, 373-449.

³ See on these lines the commentaries, esp. Barth, *Colossians*, 200-201.

⁴ Such beings belong also to the worldview of the apostle himself: Romans 8.38-39, I Corinthians 8.5, 10.20-21, Galatians 3.19, 4.3, cf. Ephesians 1.21, 6.12.

tends to conceive of this realm of reality according to oppositional categories as well. First there is the church, those individuals who comprise the holy and the elect of God, those who are clothing themselves with the new humanity and seeking that which is "above" in heaven. Opposite this is the old humanity, characterized by earthly vices and antagonism to God's will. This category of reality the author applies to the recipients' pre-conversion lives and presumably also to humanity at large, including the errorists.

This basic, theoretical framework as outlined above suggests that the fundamental categories of the author's worldview may be charted in the following manner:

	Heavenly in nature	Earthly in nature
Spiritual world (invisible)	God, Christ	cosmic powers
Human world (visible)	'new' humanity (virtue)	'old' humanity (vice)

It is plain, however, that these distinctions are not wholly self-contained items that lack dynamic or interactive dimensions. Indeed, the writer assumes a great deal of interrelation among the categories, though the actions and relations involved can take on varying forms.⁵ To illustrate: first, it is taken for granted that there is interpenetration between the spiritual and the human realms of existence. For instance, God can reveal to human beings divine secrets regarding the spiritual world (specifically, regarding God's will) via the mystery of the gospel. This revelation is achieved as God summons and dispatches certain people, like the apostle Paul, to proclaim God's word to those who have been chosen by God, the saints. As for the categories placed on the right-hand column of the

⁵ Wedderburn, *Theology*, 52-53: "The author of Colossians probably...in large measure shares the world-view of Jewish apocalyptic and mystical writings...that of a hidden upper world that already exists now, into which the faithful may penetrate in some fashion or other...or through the presence there already of that Christ with whom Christians are already firmly united." The reality of that hidden world, God's mystery, will be revealed later to all the universe.

chart, the writer presupposes that the quasi-divine powers venerated by the adherents of the philosophy have revealed to these people certain regulations, commands, and teachings by which the powers may be appeased (or at least the author assumes this is the claim that they make). Conversely, according to the letter's explanation of reality it is possible for members of the visible world to gain entry or access in one manner or another to the realm of the invisible. For those in the opposition at Colossae, this entails some sort of visionary experience, perhaps of the angelic worship of God. For the author and the letter's readers, this involves union through baptism with Christ, who is above, seated at God's right hand. They are incorporated into the body, the church, of which the heavenly Christ is the head.

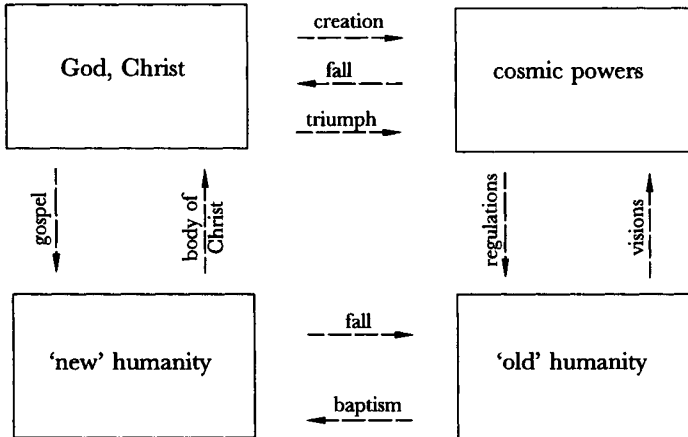
Second, we learn also of movement along the horizontal rows of the chart. The rulers and powers of the spiritual world, says the author, do not enjoy the same type of divine status as do God and Christ. They are, instead, dependent and inferior beings, created by God through and for Christ, and it is in Christ that they are "held together" (1.17). Sometime after their creation, though, a "fall" of some type seems to have occurred, and for a time the powers opposed God, or at least their existence and activity was not in accord with God's will. This situation was rectified by the Christ-event: "through the blood of the cross" (1.20) God triumphed over the rulers and authorities, making peace and reconciling them with God, rendering their regulations and commands worthless (2.14-15). These beings, however, continue to exist and to exercise at least some power, at least over human beings who are not in Christ.

A similar scenario applies to the bottom row of the chart. Echoes of the first chapter of Genesis in Colossians 1.15 and 3.10 would have reminded readers that God had originally made humanity whole and good, but on account of the fall people became estranged from God, living in sin (how this fall of humanity might relate to that of the cosmic powers is left unspecified).⁶ Yet for those who are in Christ, incorporated into his body in baptism, there is the possibility of sharing in his death and his victory over the cosmic elements. These people are renewed, as they put on the new human being in which the unity and holiness that God intends for humanity is being established. However, the threat of the old humanity is still present and the eschatological fulfillment still lies in the future. Even those

⁶ O'Brien, *Colossians*, 43; Barth, *Colossians*, 414; cf. C.F. Burney, "Christ as the APXH of Creation," *JTS* 27 (1926) 160-177; Jervell, *Imago Dei*, 249-250; cf. below, p. 198, n. 45.

saints who are in Christ can be chastised when they act as though they "still belonged to the world" (2.20).

By taking into account the sorts of actions and relationships just described, our diagram of the author's worldview takes on a more dynamic quality, thus:



The events indicated here illustrate how each of the major elements of the author's worldview takes part in actions of some sort vis-à-vis one or more of the others. The observation that all of these elements are understood by the letter-writer to act and be acted upon raises the question of the sequential and logical relationship of these various actions. Indeed, it seems possible that the individual events that contribute to the author's worldview are all components of the larger and more complex "story" or narrative substructure that informs the epistle's presupposed comprehensive explanation of reality. As we will see, it is possible to analyze the meta-world assumed by this underlying narrative in terms of its bearing on the paraenetic function of the text, as the author's story is applied to the audience's situation. We take our cue for this task from Wayne Meeks, who, referring to the moral traditions of early Christianity generally, observes that "the most prolific consequence of belief in an active God is the generation of moral narrative."⁷ The investigation of how this belief generates a moral narrative for the letter to the Colossians will occupy our attention in the remainder of this chapter.

⁷ Meeks, *Origins*, 173.

The Worldview of Colossians as Narrative

In the preceding discussion, references to particular events and actions (creation, the fall, the triumph of Christ, baptism, and so on) emerged as fundamental components of the author's symbolic universe, which is forged by the text in conjunction with its exhortatory objective. The number and significance of these events for a paraenetic document like Colossians (like many other examples of paraenesis from antiquity) suggest the possibility for us as modern literary critics of discerning beneath or behind the discursive surface of the text, in which the author tells and commands the readers certain things, an underlying or implied narrative substructure, in which the author shows the readers how these various events fit together to form a story.⁸

The attempt to assess Colossians from a narrational perspective should not be construed as a proposition that the letter as a literary product belongs to a narrative genre, such as, say, autobiography or gospel.⁹ The point, rather, is that in promoting a particular worldview in conjunction with its paraenetic qualities (as outlined above), Colossians necessarily refers its readers to a story that expresses and supports this view and their place in its symbolic universe. Such an observation follows from the work of numerous scholars who have investigated the relationship between worldview and story in ancient (and modern) cultures.¹⁰ In summarizing the findings of such scholarship, N.T. Wright, for example, observes that "all worldviews contain an irreducible narrative element"¹¹ and that "[n]arrative is the most characteristic expression of worldview."¹² Any effective world-

⁸ Cf. Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Advances in Semiotics; Bloomington, London: Indiana University Press, 1979) 29-31; Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3.1-4.11* (SBLDS 56; Chico: Scholars Press, 1983) 1 ff., 37 ff., and passim; Robert Funk, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1988) 134-161.

⁹ Though Colossians does contain elements that could conceivably relate to either an autobiography (1.24-2.5) or a gospel (1.15-20). In fact, very few letters from antiquity could be classified generically as narrative, though cf., e.g., Plato, *Epistulae* 7, or the *Epistula Aristaeas*.

¹⁰ In addition to the references that follow, mention may be made of Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (3 vols.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, 1985, 1988); Arthur C. Danto, *Narration and Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

¹¹ N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God 1; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 38.

¹² Wright, *People of God*, 123.

view, it seems, must be articulated through and embodied in a story or stories to some extent. The narrative dimension lends to the worldview shape and direction, demonstrating how it relates concretely to the experiences, history, and expectations of people who are themselves living out a kind of "story."¹³ Among other factors, the narrative drive behind a comprehensive explanation of reality shows how the basic forces and institutions and events that comprise the worldview work themselves out and interact in the arena of human experience.

Another way of putting this is that stories as such constitute one of the rudiments of human life and consciousness. Stories are the mechanisms with which people comprehend reality, articulate belief systems, and establish standards for behavior. An essential function of worldviews, then, is to provide such stories, to create for them a narrative universe that bestows meaning, defines necessary criteria for evaluation, and explains the motivations of the actors that the stories contain. Insofar as any instance of paraenetic instruction relies upon its audience's appropriation of its particular worldview in order to be meaningful and successful, we may adopt as a working hypothesis the idea that the operation of a narrative substructure is somehow constitutive to the paraenetic genre as such.

The basis for an analysis of non-narrative genres directed in a fashion such as that implied above can be located in the work of a host of modern scholars, though we may single out the recent contributions of Walter Fisher for closer inspection, since many of his observations are particularly serviceable for our project. Building on the theories of Kenneth Burke,¹⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre,¹⁵ and many others, Fisher wants to devise an approach to reading texts that is predicated upon a narrative paradigm. This paradigm understands human beings as inherently storytellers, as authors and co-authors,¹⁶ who creatively read and evaluate texts that have meaning for their

¹³ Every story impugns to its readers a conceptual system and point of view in relation to which stand the narrative's events; the implied readers must accept the author's worldview, if only provisionally or imaginatively, in order to grasp the logic and meaning of the story; see Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1978) 147-158.

¹⁴ Among numerous titles, the most pertinent seem to be Kenneth Burke, *Philosophy of Literary Form* (rev. ed.; New York: Vintage, 1957); idem, *A Grammar of Motives and a Rhetoric of Motives* (Cleveland: Meridan, 1962); idem, *Counter-Statement* (reprint; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

¹⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (2nd ed.; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984); for a critique see Franklin I. Gamwell, *The Divine Good: Modern Moral Theory and the Necessity of God* (San Francisco: Harper-Collins, 1990) 61-84.

¹⁶ The latter referring to the readers, who follow and participate in a story.

lives.¹⁷ In conjunction with this paradigm, Fisher argues forcefully for a number of basic propositions regarding human communication as narration. Assuming that stories and storytelling are fundamental for human experience, Fisher goes beyond this generally accepted idea to postulate the more challenging thesis that all serious forms of human communication (even those structured according to the standards of dialectic or of technical exposition) are most effectively interpreted from a narrational perspective. It follows from this for Fisher that all discourse can be evaluated in terms of its "narrative logic," even if other, more formal categories of logic might apply to a given instance of communication,¹⁸ and that, in fact, people tend – often intuitively – to test the validity of stories in terms of such narrative logic. Individuals, then, acknowledge and adopt a certain story on account of their intrinsic narrativity, because they can identify with the logic of the story, as they test its congruence with their own experience.

Fisher proceeds to plot the components of this logic in terms of two criteria, which represent two different standards of reasoned assessment: narrative coherence and narrative fidelity. According to Fisher, these criteria will invariably include to some degree applying what he calls "the logic of good reasons." Good reasons in this context refer to those elements of a story that provide warrants for accepting and adhering to the advice fostered by the narrative insofar as it can be said to have a rhetorical nature.¹⁹ Good reasons, then, are anything in the story which authorizes, sanctions, or justifies in the mind of the reader certain beliefs or actions. They constitute the basis for adopting and internalizing the story's message.²⁰ Another way of saying this is that the logic of good reasons constitutes that

¹⁷ Walter R. Fisher, *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action* (Studies in Rhetoric/Communication; Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987) 18.

¹⁸ It is not Fisher's purpose to demolish this sort of formal logic or rationality, but to counter historical efforts to relegate non-technical and non-philosophical forms of discourse to a secondary or negative status regarding the way that they ensure the discovery and validation of their connection with truth, knowledge, reality, etc. According to Fisher, these formal categories of logic and rationality can occur in discourse only together with and in addition to a ubiquitous narrative logic, governed by its own definitions of rationality. However, it is contestable that rationality, even as defined by Fisher, is at the heart of all communication, esp. rhetorical action, or that rational argument is prerequisite to rhetorical competence; see the review by Gerard A. Hauser in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 74 (1988) 347-349.

¹⁹ Fisher, *Communication*, 47-48; cf. Karl R. Wallace, "The Substance of Rhetoric: Good Reasons," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 49 (1963) 239-249; Stephen Toulmin, "Reasons and Causes," *Explanation in the Behavioural Sciences* (ed. Robert Borger and Frank Cioffi; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) 1-26.

²⁰ Fisher, *Communication*, 106-121.

process by which readers ask of a text the sorts of critical questions that enable them to locate and weigh the values imbedded in it.²¹ In identifying and judging these values, readers can extrapolate from what is situational to the story at hand certain universal or objective principles of which they not only approve but which become the stuff of their own self-identification.²² As a consequence, Fisher's narrative paradigm implies that all incidents of human communication should be viewed as "inevitably moral inducements."²³ And so, given that all people exhibit a natural capacity to assess communication narratively, "narrative can be considered ethically as the supreme instrument for building values and goals" in human cultures.²⁴

In this light one can understand how, from the perspective of Fisher's paradigm, narrative figures prominently in the articulation of worldview. "The world as we know it," he writes, "is a set of stories that must be chosen among in order for us to live life in a process of continual re-creation."²⁵ The good reasons of his narrative logic are the expressions by which people communicate cultural reality, by which they communicate the processes of socialization and re-socialization. The stories that are constituent of a worldview are in principle normative.²⁶ Inasmuch as a narrative claims to make sense of the whole of reality, it necessitates a decision on the part of the reader whether or not to embrace it as a controlling story over other stories. It is through this controlling set of stories that the reader interprets all secondary narratives, as well as all rival narratives.²⁷ Narration, then, would appear to be a particularly effective implement for subverting or modifying competing stories and the worldviews united to them. But in order to continue operating in this con-

²¹ Fisher, *Communication*, 47-48.

²² Fisher, *Communication*, 65-66, 94-95; cf. Wayne C. Booth, *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974) 111-125.

²³ Fisher, *Communication*, 58.

²⁴ Fisher, *Communication*, 65, quoting Victor Turner, "Social Dramas and the Stories About Them," *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980) 167.

²⁵ Fisher, *Communication*, 65.

²⁶ Catherine Sullivan ("Transcending Everyday Life Through Narrative Communication: Stories That Help Us Cope," *On Narratives: Proceedings of the 10th International Colloquium on Speech Communication* [ed. Hellmut Geissner; Frankfurt am Main: Scriptor, 1987] 116-129) refers to the "implicit enthymematic structure" that narrative communication entails, as it unites narrator and listener in the collaborative and bonding endeavor of producing a story, transcending the individuality of each participant; this is one of the mechanisms by which narrative derives power to manage conflicts in a potentially confusing world, by establishing meaningful patterns of relationships that organize meaning and experience.

²⁷ Cf. Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theory* (ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 65-88.

trolling mode, a story requires continuous checking vis-à-vis the reader's actual praxis and social knowledge in the form of a sort of verification process.²⁸ As Fisher puts it, the good reasons by which people communicate worldview, which often take the form of references to symbols and symbolic actions,

are created and communicated ultimately as stories meant to give order to human existence and to induce others to dwell in them in order to establish ways of living in common, in intellectual and spiritual communities in which there is confirmation for the story that constitutes one's life.²⁹

These remarks suggest that the moral code one adopts is real only to that extent to which one "lives" its story. Moreover, this life is invariably praxis-oriented and community-centered. In a paraenetic context like Colossians, therefore, the astute interpreter will not construe its underlying narrative substructure as simply an addendum to the author's thought or the text's composition, but as essential to how the paraenesis functions morally to persuade, to convey values, to construct worldview, and to shape the self-identification of the audience over against hostile positions.

At this juncture we may address the problem of isolating the central narrative elements underlying the text of Colossians and explaining how these elements fit to impart a story that is consistent with the epistle's exhortatory objectives. Above we discussed the main characters that appear in the letter, their respective statuses and mutual relationships, as well as the primary events in which these characters participate. As for determining how these events may be linked together in order to create meaningful narrative sequences, several preliminary distinctions must be made. The first distinction concerns the two different types of narrative ordering or arranging that a story may possess.³⁰

The first type of narrative ordering, which will be designated the textual order, refers to the succession of events as they appear in the

²⁸ Wright, *People of God*, 40-41. Michael Goldberg (*Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction* [2nd ed.; Philadelphia: Trinity, 1991] 194-240) outlines one possible process for verifying or justifying a "narrative theology" (cf. pp. 34-36).

²⁹ Fisher, *Communication*, 63; cf. Kenneth Burke, "Definition of Man," *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature and Method* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966) 3-24.

³⁰ On this distinction cf. René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (3rd ed.; New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1956) 20-28, 212-225; Boris Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973) 127-129; Norman R. Petersen, *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 33-48; idem, *Rediscovering Paul: Philemon and the Sociology of Paul's Narrative World* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 43-53, 65 ff.; Funk, *Poetics*, 188-206.

text itself as one reads it from beginning to end. So, to take Colossians 1.4-5 as an illustration, according to the epistle's textual order, the event of Paul and Timothy's hearing of the audience's faith in the gospel is prior to the event of the audience's initially hearing and learning that gospel, because the reader of the letter encounters the reference to this event at an earlier point in the text.³¹ In a composition like Colossians, the events to which the textual order refers are arranged and presented according to criteria that are predominantly non-narrative in nature. Instead, the nature of these criteria might be described as paraenetic or epistolary or polemical.

Contrasting with this is the second type of narrative ordering, which will be designated the chronological order. This narrative arrangement represents a secondary abstraction from the text in which events are presented for the sake of understanding and interpretation according to their logical succession. In virtually every story, this chronological order will differ from the textual order, though not necessarily in every detail. To return to our previous example: according to the chronological order of Colossians 1.4-5, ordinary, sequential logic would dictate that the audience must have first received the gospel before Paul and Timothy could hear the good news of their faith in that gospel. So, in this instance, the chronological order involves a reversal of the textual order. Of course, in some cases what constitutes the "logic" behind the chronology of events referred to in a text will be open to debate.³² Also, and as we will see later, it appears that in certain places events must be supplied by the reader-interpreter to the chronological order in order to satisfy its internal logic, even though these events are not part of the textual order. The presence of these "implied" events means that often the chronological order of a given story will include more events than its textual counterpart.³³ In other words,

³¹ "We heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love that you have for all the saints on account of the hope...which you heard beforehand in the word of truth, the gospel."

³² A certain logic is necessary for a series of happenings to constitute a story of some kind, and, to be sure, every story will establish on its own terms a natural logic of what is possible or likely, though this logic must correspond to some extent with facts and probabilities supplied by the readers' worldview, with their ideas of appropriate behavior; cf. Hays, *Faith*, 213-233; Funk, *Poetics*, 52-58, 85-92; Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 21, 45-53.

³³ This does not necessarily mean that the chronological ordering will be longer than the textual ordering, since often the latter will refer to the same incident more than one time; the repetition of references, a feature generally lacking in the chronological ordering owing to the demands of its internal logic, adds something to the length and complexity of the textual ordering.

from a total field of events necessary to hold a story together as a coherent narrative, the author of that story ordinarily must select those that seem to him or her most directly pertinent to the aims of the discourse and then distribute them creatively according to the distinct literary and rhetorical exigencies of the text.³⁴ Our first and main task in exposing the underlying narrative substructure of Colossians will be to reconstruct and analyze the chronological order of its story. Having reconstructed this order, one could then compare and contrast the chronological order with the textual order as a way of disclosing some of the special formal and material features of the author's composition.³⁵

A second important distinction concerns how the episodes included in a narrative relate to the experiences of the text's readers.³⁶ Here again it appears that two different categories of storytelling may be distinguished. The first type I refer to as the internal story of the narrative. This internal story includes those characters whose actions (from the viewpoint of the story) necessarily relate exclusively to the personal experiences of the readers. These characters, and hence the actions associated with them, belong to what we might call the local or social order of the audience. In the story of Colossians, the characters of the internal story would include the audience itself, Epaphras, and the adherents of the philosophy. These are the individuals who are known in the flesh, who belong to the world of daily face-to-face encounters. While it is no doubt conceivable according to the logic of the story that a figure like Epaphras could have acted in ways that have nothing to do with the audience, the author has chosen to impart for the story only those actions performed by him that have impacted or have to do with the Colossians directly. Thus the importance of Epaphras to the narrative is to be observed exclusively from this internal or (we could say) subjective perspective.

The second category of storytelling will be designated the external story. This story includes all those characters whose actions (from the viewpoint of the story) do not necessarily relate exclusively to the personal experiences of the readers. These characters belong to what

³⁴ Among both ancient and modern literary critics, there appears to be agreement that in communication which is principally rhetorical or argumentative in character, allusion to story, rather than straightforward narration, is preferable: Michael McGuire, "Narrative Persuasion in Rhetorical Theory," in Geissner, *On Narratives*, 165.

³⁵ On the textual order of Colossians see Chapter Six below.

³⁶ On this distinction cf. Petersen, *Literary Criticism*, 9-23, 33-39; idem, *Rediscovering Paul*, 1-10, 22-30; Eco, *Role*, 200 ff.

we might call the cosmic, universal, or heavenly order of things. In the story of our letter, the external characters include God, Christ, and the cosmic powers. While some of the actions initiated by these characters certainly do influence the readers' personal lives, not all of the actions performed by them can necessarily be said to do so. Indeed, many of the actions associated with God, Christ, and the powers seem to influence human beings everywhere. In contrast to the internal characters, these figures are known to the audience in the spirit and not in the flesh.

In some cases, it is not entirely clear to which category a particular figure in the story should be assigned. As we will learn below, for instance, the character of "Paul" and his actions in the narrative of Colossians seem to serve as a bridge that links the external story with the internal one.

The third preliminary distinction to bear in mind as we investigate the narrative substructure of the epistle has to do with whether or not the events included in a story have, from the vantage point of the reader, already been accomplished.³⁷ In the narrative of a text like Colossians, as in most story-telling, the author presents and evaluates the events that comprise the narrative as completed actions that belong to the past, both the past of the author and of the audience. In fact, a crucial feature of a text's narrative substructure emerges as the writer constructs for the recipients a "history," an historical context and perspective that impose a certain logic on the myriad experiences in life. At the same time, and as part of this (often artistic) construction, the narrator may also creatively project the occurrence of events that – from the perspective of the text's assumed author and readers – belong to the future and so are not yet completed or achieved. As with the narration of past events, the author will ordinarily attribute to the sequence of future events a sense of order that shows or predicts or demands how these events will be related to one another and how they follow from occurrences that belong to the presumed past and present. Among the prominent future events projected in Colossians, for instance, the author seems to include the continued faithfulness of the readers to the Pauline gospel and the presentation of the readers before God as holy and blameless people at the eschatological judgment. As the construction of 1.22-23 makes plain, the fulfillment of the first event (or series of events) will help make the second one possible, and indeed a consid-

³⁷ This distinction designates the temporal point of view; cf. Uspensky, *Poetics*, 8-56; Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 62-84; Petersen, *Rediscovering Paul*, 44-53.

erable amount of the letter's material addresses how these future events can and should be realized.

A concern for projecting future occurrences, and for how events of the past and present relate to these occurrences, can be found in most every text that exhibits a narrative substructure, though very often this concern emerges most clearly when an epistle operates as the "host" genre for the narrative. This fact may provide another clue as to the choice of the letter-form as a vehicle for communicating the message of Colossians. In terms of its temporal standpoint on the narrative, the letter-form typically will situate itself in the midst of a sequence of actions (specifically at the moment of the writing and/or receiving of the letter) and so its presentation and evaluation of actions within the narrative substructure are both retrospective and prospective in nature – both, as it were, remindful and wishful. The story conveyed by a letter, in conjunction with this temporal standpoint, explains both the author's motivations for writing and what he hopes to accomplish vis-à-vis the readership by means of the text, demonstrating how the act of writing fits into the larger narrative.³⁸ This sort of temporal point of view as we can discern it in Colossians seems to be particularly appropriate to the situation of the readers in terms of the author's assessment, as they live with one foot in the past, so to speak, and the other in the (historical and eschatological) future.

It also appears that the epistolary genre is especially well-suited to conveying stories where both the ostensible author and audience are major characters of the narrative. Often even the letter itself, its composition, transmission, and reception, becomes part of the story, specifically part of the internal narrative, as depicted above.³⁹ In Colossians, as in most any paraenetic letter, the primary focus of the text's literary and rhetorical transaction, and hence its success as a form of communication, lies with the relationship that is established between the writer and the recipient as participants in the story, and only secondarily with relationships that the recipients take on with other characters in the story, characters who are not necessarily part of the epistolary exchange.⁴⁰

³⁸ Petersen, *Rediscovering Paul*, 44-45.

³⁹ Koskenniemi, *Studien*, 88-95.

⁴⁰ Thus the sort of authorial image created by the letter, as examined in Chapter Two, is not static, but takes on distinct temporal and narrational perspectives.

Cosmic History, Apostolic History, Local History

In the task of extracting the major episodes and actions from the textual sequence of Colossians' narrative and arranging them in chronological order, it comes as no surprise that we encounter not one simple story but rather what appear to be multiple story lines.⁴¹ This represents a quite common phenomenon in narrative constructions.⁴² Part of the author's skill surfaces in how these different story lines inform one another and cohere as a group to produce a meaningful total product. In Colossians there appear to be three major story lines. The first of these story lines corresponds to what was described above as the letter's external narrative and external characters. The third story line, in contrast, attends to the letter's internal narrative and internal characters. The second story line, which will be examined last, does not seem to conform strictly to either the internal or external stories but operates in an intermediary position or order, serving in part to link the events and characters of the first and the third story lines.

The first story line relates those events and characters which are of cosmic or heavenly significance.⁴³ Both the bearing and the time-frame of this story line are the most comprehensive of the three story lines. It encompasses not only universal events but also activities that extend, literally, from the beginning to the end of time.⁴⁴ Because the other story lines lack this sweeping temporal and spatial scope, it would be fair to say that their respective accounts can be understood to be superimposed to some extent upon this primary story line and in some sense ultimately dependent upon it for their setting, motivations, and direction. The central characters of the first story line are God, Christ, and the cosmic powers and principalities. The first event associated with this story line and of the entire narrative of Colossians is creation. God created in, through, and for Christ, who is the firstborn of all creation, everything in heaven and on earth, including in particular the cosmic rulers and powers (1.15-17, cf. 3.10). Thus the existence and activity of God and Christ are given primacy

⁴¹ Cf. Petersen, *Rediscovering Paul*, 65-66.

⁴² Cf. Adele Reinhartz, *The Word in the World: The Cosmological Tale in the Fourth Gospel* (SBLMS 45; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992).

⁴³ The discussion that follows may be compared with Ben Witherington, *Paul's Narrative Thought World: The Tapestry of Tragedy and Triumph* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994).

⁴⁴ In addition to projecting future events, narratives often also imply some events or conditions that existed before the beginning of the chronology they relate, e.g., in the gospel according to Mark both the birth and upbringing of Jesus are presupposed.

over those of all other agents in the story, which belong to the created order. Indeed, it is only "in him" that all these things hold together.

The next event of this story line, which is critical to establishing the "problem" or conflict that drives the whole narrative, is referred to nowhere in the text, but, insofar as the logic of the author's story seems to demand it, belongs to the category of implied events. One may speak of this event as the "fall," a mythical occurrence whose explication we must suppose takes on distinctively Christian (or Pauline) contours in this setting, but which is paralleled also in various non-Christian traditions of the era, particularly those that deal with the interpretation of the history of culture.⁴⁵ According to Colossians' worldview, at some point in time a situation of estrangement or confrontation emerged between God and certain elements of the created order. These elements include the cosmic rulers and authorities that the author mentions in 1.16, 2.8, 15, and 20, and the fallen humanity, the "old" human being who lives under the dominion of darkness and is "dead" in trespasses, as discussed in 1.13, 21, 2.11, 13-14, and 3.5-9.⁴⁶ Precisely how this situation came about is left unspoken, though it does provide the central motivation for all of the events that follow in the first story line, as well as those of the second and third story lines.

In order to rectify this situation, God sent Christ to disarm the cosmic rulers and authorities, to cancel and set aside the χειρόγραφον that stood against the fallen humanity on account of its transgressions, and to reconcile with God all things, both on earth and in heaven. Thus the powers are vanquished and rendered powerless, at least insofar as they can continue to influence humanity. God does this all through Christ, specifically through Christ's crucifixion, the blood of the cross (1.20, 22, 2.14-15). After Christ's crucifixion and burial comes the resurrection. God raised Jesus from the dead; indeed he was and is the firstborn from the dead. He is exalted by God to the position of Lord of the universe (3.1), exercising preeminence in all things (1.18). In him are hidden all the treasures of di-

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Lovejoy and Boas, *Primitivism*, 23-102, and s.v. Fall, doctrine of; L.H. Feldman, "Hellenizations in Josephus' Portrayal of Man's Decline," *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of E.R. Goodenough* (ed. Jacob Neusner; SHR 14; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968) 336-353; cf. Julien Ries, "The Fall," *ER* 5 (1987) 256-267. Some examples from paraenetic discourse: Maximus of Tyre, *Orationes* 36.1-6; Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 90.4 ff.

⁴⁶ The identification of Jesus Christ as the "first-born from the dead" in 1.18 suggests that for the letter-writer death itself was one of the primary ramifications of the fall.

vine wisdom and knowledge (2.3); he is the head of the body, which is the church (1.18, 2.19).

The references to this last aspect of Christ's resurrected status imply another episode in the story line, that of God choosing and calling human beings to be "in Christ," to become members of the body of which Christ is the head.⁴⁷ In this way the body grows, thanks to divine power and care (2.19, cf. 1.10-11). Those who are in Christ are rescued by God from their former plight through baptism; they receive from God redemption, the forgiveness of sins (1.14). They are raised from the dead in Christ and made alive (2.13, 3.1). As they grow in the divine knowledge of God and do God's will as God's elect (1.9-10), they are renewed in knowledge after the pattern of Christ, who is the image of God, the creator (3.10-11). To facilitate this process, God calls upon a special servant, Paul, who is commissioned to reveal God's word, God's will, the gospel, to all those who will listen (1.1, 25-29, 4.3-4), and to take on suffering for the sake of the body (1.24).

The final event of this story line belongs to the future. In fact, it belongs to the very end of time, when God will reveal Christ in all his power and glory, and will sit as eschatological judge of all humanity. Those who have been true to their divine calling and faithful to the Lord, doing works worthy of him as members of the body, will be presented to God as holy and blameless (1.22-23). They themselves will be revealed in glory, to receive their share of the divine inheritance set aside for God's elect (1.12, 3.4). But those who are disobedient will experience God's wrath (3.6). Despite present appearances (which may for some readers suggest otherwise), the story of Colossians as outlined above affirms the absolute sovereignty of God in all the cosmos through Jesus Christ from the very beginning of time until the very end and at all points in between. These occurrences, projected into both the past and the future, furnish for the story line a strong sense of narrative order and closure. The story line narrates how God, through Christ, drives the course of cosmic and human events according to God's will.

The third story line of Colossians relates those events and characters which are of solely local and human significance. The central figures here are the audience itself, Epaphras, and the proponents of the philosophy. Both the scope and time-frame of this story line are restricted to the experiences of the epistle's recipients as a Christian community. Thus both temporally and spatially the dimensions of

⁴⁷ On the Colossians as chosen, called: 1.12-13, 27, 2.13, 3.12, 15.

the third story line are much more limited in nature than those of the first story line. In a sense, all of the characters and incidents of the former are included in and superimposed upon the latter. This more limited aspect of the third story line can be observed most plainly in its starting point: its first concrete event consists of the conversion of the members of the audience to Christianity. Prior to this, in the readers' pre-history, so to speak, we hear only of the deficiencies and misdeeds of the Colossians' pagan past. In this fallen state they were hostile in mind to God, committing transgressions against God's will (1.21), being "dead" in "the body of the flesh" (2.11, 13), and ignorant of God's call and God's mystery.

The crucial turning point in the story line came when the readers heard from Epaphras, Paul's beloved fellow servant, the message of God's truth, the gospel. Epaphras proclaimed God's word in the Lycus River valley in such a way that the Colossians truly comprehended God's grace, so that they had faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord (1.5-7, 4.12-13). As 2.6 puts it, making use of a traditional confessional formula, the Colossians "received Christ Jesus the Lord." Consequently, they underwent the ritual of baptism, a spiritual circumcision in which they put off the old self with its body of the flesh and through faith in the power of God were raised from the dead with Christ, putting on the new self, having been reconciled with God through Christ (1.22, 2.11-13, 3.9-10). They recognized and affirmed their status as God's chosen ones, a holy people obedient to their Lord. Christ, in effect, became their life (3.4, 12), and now their "life is hidden with Christ in God" (3.3). They participate in the reconciliation of all things with God, accomplished through Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.

As the Colossians continued to "walk" this life, the gospel grew and bore fruit in their midst, and reports began to circulate among the Christian communities of their faith in Christ and their love for all the saints, as Paul informs them in 1.3-4, 8. However, at some point in this scenario of growth and faith, a serious threat to the gospel infiltrated Colossae in the form of the philosophy. The origins and historical development of this movement are left unexplored by the author, except for some cryptic references to its "human tradition" (2.8, 22). It is significant, in fact, that within the narrative substructure of the epistle the author assigns to the philosophy no "story" of its own. Allusions to the major figures associated with the group seem to be kept deliberately vague and no concrete events of the story line are enacted by them. The significance of the philosophy for the narrative, rather, is to be measured only in terms of how it relates to the story line of the readers. The letter's stern warnings

indicate that in the recent past some members of their community have been deceived by the philosophy, which took them "captive" (2.4, 8). They accepted the religious tenets, practices, and regulations of the false teachers and so lived not as though Christ were their Lord but as if they still belonged to the world (2.20). They essentially renounced their prior commitment to the church and the new path that this laid before them.

In response to the threat, Paul, as spiritual leader of the community founded by Epaphras and according to God's will (1.1), composed this letter and dispatched it under the care of Tychicus and Onesimus to the Christians in the Lycus River valley (4.7-9). The receipt and reading of the letter, then, become the next major event of the third story line. The letter, in effect, inserts itself into the narrative as a second turning-point that confirms and clarifies the first turning-point, their conversion to Christianity. From here on in the narrative sequence all the events belong to the projected future of the readers; these events belong to two principal categories.

The first set of projected events belongs to the future of the readers on earth. It is at this juncture that the exhortatory features of the text emerge as a critical component of the narrative substructure of the third story line. It is also here that we can see most plainly how the narrative objectives of the epistolary and paraenetic genres dovetail. The futuristic perspective of the sorts of stories conveyed in letters is entirely appropriate to a paraenetic message insofar as paraenesis wants to influence the ongoing behavior of those addressed. The emphasis on moral exhortation and the fairly large number of direct commands in the letter create certain prospects for the text's story of future deeds to be performed by the readers. The fulfillment of these implied events creates closure, a satisfaction of previously engendered expectations.⁴⁸ The content of the audience's future existence, articulated in the paraenetic style, occupies a great deal of the author's attention, particularly in 2.6-4.6. Here he projects the existence of a Colossian community that is no longer misled by the false teachings of the philosophy and that no longer participates in its mystical and ascetic practices. The individuals of the church will jettison once and for all those ungodly doctrines that they previously followed and will adhere to cooperative virtues. They will conduct themselves within the social institutions of the world and with respect for the moral obligations that are appropriate to these institutions "in the Lord," as evidenced by the rules for

⁴⁸ Cf. Petersen, *Rediscovering Paul*, 13-14, 50; Funk, *Poetics*, 126-132.

the household (3.18-4.1). Above all, they will constitute a prayerful community, full of gratitude and praise for God, faithful to and built upon their Lord Jesus Christ as they initially received him in the Pauline gospel as proclaimed by Epaphras and confirmed by the letter itself.

The second set of events that belong to the future of the addressees in the third story line concerns their destiny at the end of time, at the eschatological judgment. The nature of this episode in their life-history is closely connected to and contingent upon the first set of projected future acts, as the author states in 1.22-23. If the Colossians pursue the sort of ethical course projected by Paul in 2.6-4.6, remaining steadfast in their faith and in the promise of the gospel, continuing to walk in the Lord, they will be presented as a holy people who are "mature in Christ" and their life in Christ will be revealed with him in glory. It is to this end that Paul and his associates work with all their energy (1.28-29, 4.12-13).

In the narrative substructure of most any epistolary exchange, the person of the presumed author appears as a major character. At the very least, the author's composition and dispatching of the letter figures as a critical event that determines the perspective from which other events are related and projected. In Colossians, the person and career of Paul loom large in the letter's story and worldview, to the extent that we can identify a separate story line that revolves around the accomplishments of the apostle. I refer to this as the second story line because, chronologically, its account starts at a point after the beginning of the first story line (creation) but before that of the third story line (the conversion of the addressees). This designation of the apostolic story line as the second one is appropriate, too, because episodically it functions in an intermediary position between the first and the third story lines. The person and activity of Paul serve to join the characters and events of the first story line with those of the third so that the story of the epistle as a whole maintains a certain structural integrity.⁴⁹

It can be noted additionally that the main figure of the story line, Paul, does not belong clearly to either the cast of external characters (associated with the first story line) or the cast of internal characters (associated with the third story line) but seems to belong to both si-

⁴⁹ This story line differs from the first and the third in terms of its mode of narration insofar as it takes on autobiographical characteristics, for which cf. Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960) 95-132; Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (ed. James Olney; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) 28-48; Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative*, 96-145.

multaneously.⁵⁰ Insofar as Paul is a human and not divine being, he is like all the characters of the third story line but unlike all those of the first. However, as 1.24 in particular demonstrates, Paul belongs to a special and unique category of human being. He is the one who completes what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of Christ's body, which is the church universal. As a consequence, Paul's activities are not restricted to the locale of the Lycus River valley. Rather Paul proclaims the gospel everywhere and to everyone, struggling even for those who have not seen him personally (1.23, 28, 2.1). Thus, unlike the characters of the third story line, Paul does not belong to the recipients' world of daily face-to-face encounters. He is not known in the flesh, but his presence is felt among them only in the spirit and through his correspondence (2.1, 5, cf. 4.8-9).⁵¹ If the original readers of the letter had knowledge of Paul's martyrdom, this datum would only add to the spiritual nature of the apostle as a figure in the letter's narrative.⁵² The apostle, then, is in a special position to proclaim the truth concerning both the heavenly, universal realities of the letter's external story and the local, human realities of its internal story. Moreover, through his words and deeds Paul unites these realities in such a way that they have meaning for the addressees, occupying a critical position in the narrative and worldview of the epistle.

The first episode of this story line is Paul's being assigned a commission by God to proclaim God's word to all creation in the hope of winning them over to Christ (1.23, 25). The business initiated by this commission is described as the revelation of a divine mystery that had been hidden in heaven throughout the ages and generations, suggesting something of the story line's "pre-history."⁵³ This commission sets in motion all the ensuing events of the story line and explains how and why it intersects with the first and third story lines. In order to fulfill this divine order, Paul preaches, labors, and suffers on behalf of the mystery, in order to make the gospel known among the gentiles. As a means of advancing the apostolic mission, Paul

⁵⁰ He appears to be unique in this regard.

⁵¹ On the "presence" of the narrator see McGuire, "Narrative Persuasion," 169-172; the effectiveness of the narrator's presence is increased when the first-person singular and/or direct discourse are used in the story.

⁵² In this case, Paul's death might belong to one of the implied events of the second story line.

⁵³ The wording of 1.13-14, using the first-person plural, also suggests that, like the readers themselves, Paul himself was baptized and rescued from the power of darkness; presumably this episode, too, would belong to the series of events connected with his apostolic call and commission (cf. Acts 9.3-19, 22.3-21, 26.4-23, Galatians 1.15-16).

gathers fellow workers who assist him in the struggle. While it is not stated in so many words, an event that the story line seems to imply, and indeed is necessary to its logical sequence, is that of Paul sending Epaphras to evangelize the region of the Lycus River valley. Both 1.7-8 and 4.12-13 assume a very close working relationship between the apostle and Epaphras, suggesting that the latter served as Paul's authorized agent.

At some point, and as part of his suffering on behalf of the church, Paul was imprisoned. The details relevant to this incarceration are not provided, though see 4.3-4, 10, and 18. We can assume that afterwards (though perhaps also prior to this) Paul began to receive reports from Epaphras and perhaps others of the success experienced by the Christian mission in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. This news was a cause for giving thanks to God and for interceding in prayer to God on behalf of the saints in those cities (1.3-8, 4.7-17). But the apostle also got wind of a conflict that was troubling the area and that imperiled the stability of the congregations there. To avert a potential disaster, Paul sends this letter off to the Colossians (and the Laodiceans) from prison, affirming their good standing in the faith but also warning them of the danger posed by the philosophy.⁵⁴ By means of the letter, Paul makes his presence felt in the community and reminds the recipients that in truth he has been with them all along "in spirit" (2.5).

The identification of the sorts of events projected in the second story line for the apostle's future on earth, in the period after his writing of the letter, is left somewhat vague, perhaps deliberately. The readers of the epistle are clearly led to assume that should they heed its advice and remain true to the Pauline gospel, the apostle will continue to be present in their community in spirit. The wording of 4.3 – "pray for us...that God will open to us a door for the word" – implies also another hoped-for event of the story line, namely, Paul's release from prison.⁵⁵ However, the most critical future event of the story line belongs to the time of the eschatological denouement. Colossians 1.28 in particular indicates that the end of Paul's toil on behalf of the gospel is to render everyone "mature in Christ" (cf. 1.22, 4.12). The ultimate reckoning of how well Paul has fulfilled his divine commission will take place at that final verdict, when the congregations won over to Christ by Paul and his co-work-

⁵⁴ Colossians 4.10 and 16 suggest for the story line also the drafting of previous letters by Paul intended for Christians in the region.

⁵⁵ Assuming that the letter is pseudepigraphical, the audience would presumably have knowledge of whether or not this ever occurred.

ers will be presented to God for judgment to see if indeed their members are τέλειοι (cf. 1.12, 3.4, 6).⁵⁶

Contract and Conflict

Now that the different story lines that constitute the narrative substructure of Colossians have been identified and described, we are in position to investigate them in greater detail and according to established methods of narrative analysis. To assist in this task, a model of narrative structure of the sort first developed by A.J. Greimas can be effectively applied to our text.⁵⁷ Because this literary method has been employed by numerous critics, including many biblical scholars, I will not explicate its presuppositions and procedures exhaustively but merely refer to these studies, where fuller treatment may be found.⁵⁸

In devising his model, Greimas and those who followed after him assumed that most all narrative texts consist of a limited number of specific categories of narrative structures called sequences. Each sequence possesses its own characteristics and principles that govern its internal dynamic as well as its relationship with other sequences. Any complete story, according to the model, will relate or at least assume three such sequences: the initial sequence, a topical sequence, and the final sequence. Any given story will have one and only one initial sequence, one and only one final sequence, and at least one but possibly more than one topical sequence.⁵⁹

The purpose of the initial sequence is to introduce the story's protagonist and the basic problem that he or she must resolve. From a narrative standpoint the initial sequence is necessarily incomplete; it

⁵⁶ The eschatological judgment constitutes the point of (final) convergence for all three of the story lines.

⁵⁷ A.J. Greimas, *Sémantique Structurale* (Paris: Seuil, 1966); idem, *Du Sens* (Paris: Seuil, 1970); cf. Vladimir Propp, *The Morphology of the Folktale* (2nd ed.; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968). This model appears to be useful above all in the analysis of folk tales, mythic, and epic texts, though its application is by no means restricted to such materials and, at any rate, Colossians exhibits numerous similarities with such mythic texts.

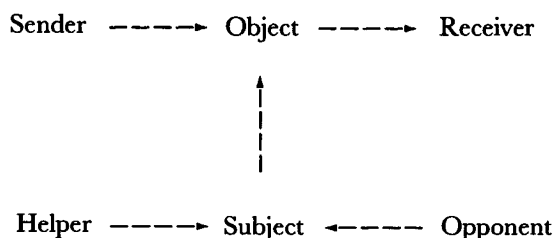
⁵⁸ Corina Galland, "An Introduction to the Method of A.J. Greimas," *The New Testament and Structuralism* (ed. Alfred M. Johnson; PTMS 11; Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1976) 1-26; Hays, *Faith*, 92 ff.; Daniel Patte, *The Religious Dimensions of Biblical Texts: Greimas's Structural Semiotics and Biblical Exegesis* (SBLSS; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990) 54 ff.; N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 193-219; idem, *People of God*, 69-80, 215-223; Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 486-494.

⁵⁹ In some stories entire sequences may be omitted by the storyteller and must be supplied by the reader; cf. the discussion of implied events above.

sets in motion the action of the topical sequence(s) which will provide the remedy to the problem. The number of topical sequences evident in any narrative usually will operate as a indication of the complexity of its overall plot. The topical sequences as a whole (whether there are one or many) convey the main action of the story as it relates to the resolution of the problem established in the initial sequence. This action establishes the means by which the protagonist resolves (or tries to resolve) the story's problem. The final sequence, then, conveys the resolution of the problem. Because the final sequence represents the completion of what was introduced in the initial sequence, these two sequences will be very similar in terms of content and structure. Hence the initial and final sequence are sometimes referred to together as the correlated sequences, as distinct from the topical sequence(s).

In analyzing each narrative sequence individually, whether it be a correlated or a topical sequence, it is possible to isolate different "syntactical units," different narrative actions or functions that relate to one another in specific ways. One such unit, for instance, is referred to as "mandating/acceptance." Here the protagonist of the story receives a mandate or contract of some sort to carry out an action. This action is intended to benefit a character in the story labeled the Receiver. Another unit is called "communication/reception." Here the protagonist benefits from various aids which better enable him or her to execute the mandate. In the units called "confrontation" and "domination/submission," the protagonist encounters and then overcomes some kind of adversity. Finally, in the "attribution" unit the contract is fulfilled and some object or value is imparted or attributed to the Receiver. Thus the original goal of the sequence is realized. Thinking of a narrative in terms of its syntactical units is helpful insofar as this approach highlights the basic forces that drive its progression of events: contract, assistance, conflict, triumph, fulfillment.

Greimas contributed also to the analysis of narrative texts by developing an "actantial" model that would correspond to and elucidate the narrative sequences of a story. This model constitutes a formal scheme that labels the story's different "actants" – the characters of the story and the objects which they use or upon which they act – and then maps them according to their narrative relationships. This model is intended to furnish for the interpreter not so much a snapshot or cross-section of the action at any particular juncture in the sequence as a synchronic picture of the sequence in its entirety. The network of actantial associations contained in a narrative sequence delineated by the model is diagrammed as follows:



According to the actantial model, each narrative sequence will manifest or presuppose six distinct roles or positions that explain how different elements of the story work. The Subject is the story's protagonist, the figure who accepts the contract or mandate and completes it. The Sender is the character who establishes the contract, who "sends" the protagonist to accomplish something. The Object is that article or quality that the Sender wishes to impart to someone via the fulfillment of the contract. The Receiver is that someone, though it need not be a particular character in the story but can be instead a corporate entity of some kind. The Helper represents those characters or forces that assist the Subject as he or she attempts to carry out the mandate, while the Opponent stands for those individuals or forces that resist the Subject and the Helper. In any one sequence the readers may encounter multiple Helpers and multiple Opponents, which may appear in the form of individuals in the story, corporate entities, or qualities of the Subject.

The task of the critic, in utilizing this model to expose the network of relations manifested by a story, is to isolate the story's sequences and to assign to each a diagram like the one above. Beyond this, though, it is possible also to identify specific patterns that clarify how a story's different actantial models are related to one another. To begin with, in every story the two correlated sequences (that is, the initial sequence and the final sequence) will manifest very similar structures of actantial positions. In fact, five of the six positions will be identical in the two correlated sequences; only the position of Helper will change in some manner. This is because the final sequence always constitutes the fulfillment of the contract whose execution had been frustrated by the circumstances represented by the initial sequence. The crucial difference appears in that with the final sequence the Subject (the protagonist) now receives an improved Helper which enables him or her to complete the mandate. This imparting of a new or improved Helper to the protagonist in the span between the initial and the final sequences indicates a critical function for the action of the topical sequences that intervene. Basically,

the topical sequences effect a change that allows the initial contract to be accomplished by communicating to the protagonist an object or quality or assistant that can serve as an adequate Helper.

Another way of putting this is that at some point, in one of the topical sequences, the protagonist (the Subject of the correlated sequences) will become a Receiver in the actantial model, and that which he or she receives in that topical sequence (the Object) will in the final sequence become the critical factor that improves the Helper and alters it significantly from the Helper that was present in the initial sequence. The following diagram illustrates this interlocking network of relations:⁶⁰

initial sequence	topical sequence	final sequence
$ \begin{array}{c} S \text{ ---- } O^1 \text{ ---- } R^1 \\ \quad \quad \quad \vdots \\ () \text{ ---- } X \text{ ---- } \text{Opp} \end{array} $	$ \begin{array}{c} S \text{ ---- } Y \text{ ---- } X \\ \quad \quad \quad \vdots \\ H \text{ ---- } \text{Subj}^2 \text{ ---- } \text{Opp} \end{array} $	$ \begin{array}{c} S \text{ ---- } O^1 \text{ ---- } R^1 \\ \quad \quad \quad \vdots \\ Y \text{ ---- } X \text{ ---- } \text{Opp} \end{array} $

Here "S" is the Sender, "O¹" the Object of the correlated sequences, "R¹" the Receiver of the correlated sequences, "Opp" the opponent or opponents, "H" the Helper of the topical sequence, and "Subj²" the Subject of the topical sequence. Most important for the present discussion, however, are "X" and "Y." The former is the Subject of the correlated sequences, who is one and the same actant as the Receiver of the topical sequence. The latter is the Object of the topical sequence, which is the same as the Helper of the final sequence. Given this scheme of relationships, it might be fair to say that within the narrative of the topical sequence we see the fulfillment of a "submandate" or "subcontract" by a "subprotagonist" (represented in this chart by "Subj²"). The fulfillment of this secondary contract is necessary for the completion of the main mandate or contract to take place.

Worldview and Narrative in Philosophic Paraenesis

The discussion in Chapter Three suggested that all instances of ancient paraenesis, each in their own way, postulate some version of

⁶⁰ The diagram is from Hays, *Faith*, 103.

worldview. In any given case, this worldview, a comprehensive explanation of reality with its own norms, symbols, roles, etc., is explicated and justified by the ideology of the author. In the case of philosophic paraenesis, this ideology relates to the essential tenets of the author's philosophic movement, though more often than not these tenets function implicitly and pragmatically rather than explicitly or systematically in the text's entreaty. The presentation of worldview in this literary context is conducted so as to aid the readers (neophytes in the movement who are still developing their new self-identity) in assimilating this worldview in such a manner and to such a degree that it informs every aspect of life, particularly as regards their processes of moral reasoning and conduct. This objective is foundational for the character of paraenesis as an instrument of guidance that directs the personal transformation of its recipients as they overcome specific challenges.

The discussion in this chapter so far has attempted to expand and refine our understanding of worldview by delineating its underlying narrative features. The elements of a worldview are not static items that can be arbitrarily abstracted from their dynamic medium, but must be appropriated and interpreted as they figure in the story or stories that are determinative for the way the people who embrace that worldview live. It stands to reason in light of these remarks that any ancient philosophic paraenetic text can be analyzed according to its narrative perspective, arrangement, and logic, in a manner that will reveal something about how the text communicates its ideology, develops worldview, and seeks to shape the self-understanding and behavior of its audience. Considerations of space preclude any wide-ranging survey of ancient paraenetic discourse in order to test fully this hypothesis. However, examination of one specific example might suffice as an illustration of the utility of this idea, before turning to a comparable investigation of our primary document, *Colossians*.

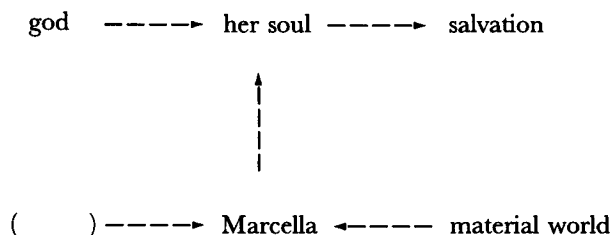
The text chosen for comparative analysis will already be familiar from preceding discussions, namely, Porphyry's epistle to his wife and student Marcella. Earlier, I outlined the Neoplatonic worldview that conditions the appeal of this letter in terms of a fundamental distinction between two realms of existence, which we might refer to as the intelligent order and the material world respectively.⁶¹ The primary subject within this explanation of reality, from the perspective of paraenesis at least, is the human soul, which has descended from the perfect and unchanging order of thought into a physical

⁶¹ See above, pp. 107-110.

body that inhabits the irrational world of decay and moral corruption. However, the soul may ascend back to its place and mode of true origin if it is able to recollect its perception of the spiritual realm by focusing on pure reason and separating itself from the illusory influences of the physical order.

The fundamental occurrences in this worldview of the descent of the soul, its struggle in a human body, and its ascent back to the divine Intellect represent a broad background for the chronological ordering postulated by the story of the text.⁶² Situated against this background are the specific events associated with Marcella's relevant life-history to which the text alludes. These events can be distinguished according to three basic chronological episodes or time references, each of which corresponds to a narrative sequence of the sort identified by Greimas. The first episode concerns Marcella's past, her pre-philosophic existence, essentially the time before the writing of the letter. The central events of this episode would include her birth, her former family life, and the death of her first husband. The next episode pertains to Marcella's present status, the occurrences and situations that surround the writing and reading of the letter. The key events here would include Marcella's marriage to Porphyry, her instruction in philosophy and the hardship it entails, the departure of Porphyry, and her current endeavors apart from her husband. The great bulk of the letter's narrative focus, however, has to do the future, which represents the third narrative episode. Porphyry is concerned in particular that Marcella adhere to the letter's advice and the type of vocation that it sketches; in this way the ascent of the soul may for her become a reality.

In terms of the narrative model developed by Greimas, the actantial structure of the initial sequence of this narrative, the sequence that introduces the basic problem of the story, might suggest the following representation of Marcella's past, her status and situation before the writing of the letter:



⁶² Which is distinct from the letter's textual ordering; see especially Porphyry's account of things in *Ad Marcellam* 1.1-4.68.

In the actantial model, Marcella appears as the Subject and central protagonist of the story. The basic problem that drives its narrative action is her need to achieve salvation for her true self, her soul, in accordance with its recollection of and affinity for the spiritual realm. In the language of the letter, "god" stands for this divine and rational order of reality.⁶³ Thus Porphyry can speak of god as Marcella's "partner," who is "sending" her into the world and "summoning" her to the pious life.⁶⁴ This in effect establishes her ultimate spiritual objective: that her soul be received by the intelligent order from which it originates. Insofar as this determines Marcella's true nature and destiny, this endeavor constitutes the central mandate of the narrative, and we may assign to god the position of Sender.

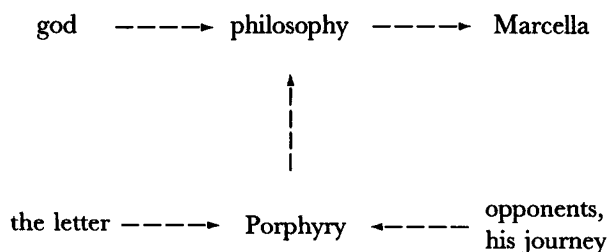
Opposing Marcella in this divinely-appointed quest is the material world, by which I mean the irrational cares of human existence that might corrupt Marcella's soul, her own physical and psychological weaknesses, those individuals who oppose her and her marriage to Porphyry, and the evil daemons, who can deceive her. As we saw above, Porphyry wants his spouse to comprehend her own situation and future in terms of his worldview and (hence) in terms of this kind of story.⁶⁵ He also wants her to comprehend the incidents of their personal history as a married couple in light of such metaphysical realities. The success of his paraenetic message, ultimately, is contingent upon her ability to accept and to "live" this story, taking on its worldview and the daily implications for morality that it evidences.

Noticeably absent at this point in the narrative of the initial sequence is any clear designation of an adequate Helper for Marcella. The need to provide such a Helper drives the action of the story's topical sequence, which corresponds to the second time frame identified above:

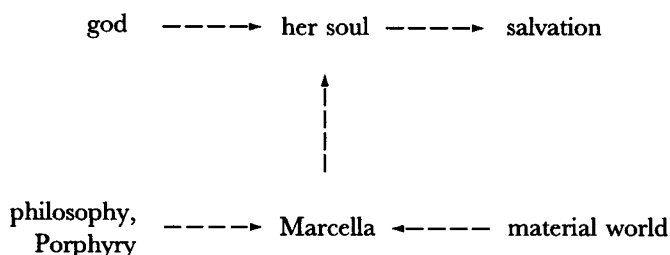
⁶³ On the letter's conception of divinity cf. above, pp. 140-141.

⁶⁴ Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 12.216-217, 18.294-298, 20.322-326, 33.501-504, cf. 1.3, 3.39, 5.75-77, 8.152-153, 11.191-12.207, 13.226-234, 15.265-16.277, 26.411-420. On god as the one who sends the soul, cf. Smith, *Porphyry's Place*, 33; Wicker, *To Marcella*, 86.

⁶⁵ This entails, in part, that she correctly realize the relationship between the story's internal and external elements. The former include Porphyry and Marcella, as well as their children, and those individuals who object to them and their marriage. To the latter category we may assign god, the evil daemons, and "the sage" and "the fool," who seem to represent generic and universally valid typifications of virtue and vice respectively.



Here Porphyry himself emerges as the subprotagonist of the narrative who, accordingly, is assigned his own submandate, which entails his being sent by god to impart to Marcella philosophy.⁶⁶ Thus the Subject of the initial sequence (Marcella) becomes the Receiver in the topical sequence, as the Greimas model predicts. In terms of its own story, the letter itself emerges as key tool (the Helper) by which Porphyry is able to overcome the distance that separates him from his wife during his journey and to instruct her in the truth. The final sequence, then, can be formulated as follows:



This sequence correlates (as it should) with the initial sequence, though with one vital difference, which is the appearance of an adequate Helper for Marcella. Porphyry and all he has done for Marcella as a philosopher changes (or actually supplies) the Helper for the final sequence. This change, brought about by the action of the topical sequence, presents the real hope that the main contract of the story can be fulfilled at some point in the future, provided that she heeds the letter's appeal.

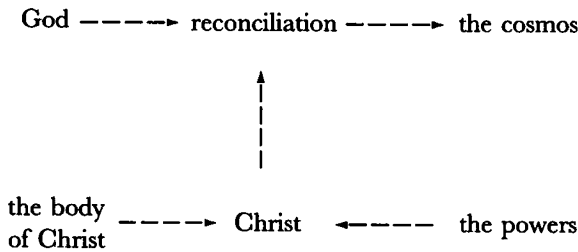
Mandate and Action in Colossians

In applying the Greimas literary model with its actantial structures to our analysis of the narrative conveyed by Colossians, it will be im-

⁶⁶ Porphyry, *Ad Marcellam* 2.22-3.40.

portant to bear in mind the three story lines of the letter identified above. As we learned there, the first of these story lines has to do with God's cosmic victory through Christ, the second centers on the career of the apostle Paul, and the third concerns the evangelization and Christian status of the churches in the Lycus River valley. As with Porphyry's paraenetic epistle to Marcella, the pertinent narrative segments evident in Colossians can be evaluated in terms of the actantial structures employed by Greimas. It appears, in fact, that the first story line corresponds with the correlated sequences of the letter's narrative, that the second story line corresponds with its first topical sequence, and that the third story line corresponds with the narrative's second topical sequence. Let us examine these sequences individually.

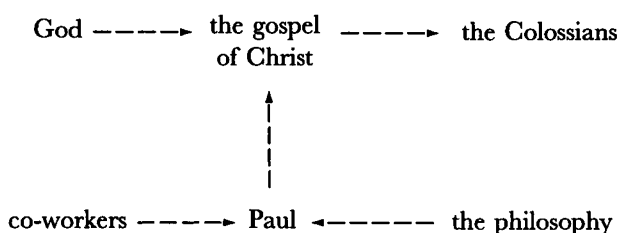
The initial sequence of our story, in which the protagonist and the basic problem of the narrative are introduced, draws from the first story line of Colossians, with its sweeping universal scope and cast of heavenly characters. The actantial structure of the sequence can be diagrammed as follows:



According to this network of relationships, the Sender (God) establishes a mandate or contract whereby God sends Christ, the protagonist, so that God will be reconciled with all things on earth and in heaven. Through Christ, his death and resurrection, God will redeem the cosmos from its fallen state. Obstructing the fulfillment of this divine mandate are "the elements of the cosmos," the invisible powers which must be disarmed, subjugated, and pacified. To the role of Helper we may assign the body, the church, of which Christ is the head. This entity, which is distinct from Christ and yet an essential attribute of his, plays a role with Christ in the fulfillment of the mandate (1.18, 2.19). The reasons why the goal of the initial sequence is frustrated (and why we have a story at all) depend largely on the fact that the time of Christ's final and complete victory over the powers that oppose the divine will has not yet arrived. Although the principalities and powers have already been

vanquished, the triumphant Christ is still hidden, not yet revealed in all his glory. In the interim the powers continue to wield ungodly influence over humankind and not all of those whom God intends to redeem have been included in the body of Christ among the saints. The extent to which the divine mandate is frustrated by these facts represents the impetus for the action of the topical sequences.

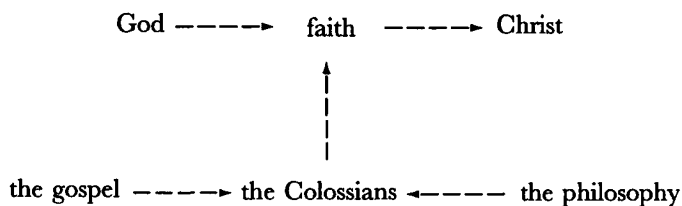
The first of these topical sequences revolves around the person and actions of Paul, the central figure of the second story line. The positions of this sequence's actantial model can be set up in this way:



The diagram identifies Paul as a new protagonist, or subprotagonist, who receives from God a submandate – the commission of 1.25 – to reveal God's mystery, the gospel of Christ. While the Receiver of Paul's action is identified in the letter as people everywhere, from the standpoint of the narrative's plot this fact is relevant only insofar as it includes the addressees themselves. Assisting Paul in his mission to bring God's word to the readers are his fellow workers, especially Epaphras, Timothy, Tychicus, and Onesimus. We may also include the Spirit among Paul's assistants, since it is only $\tau\hat{\omega}$ $\pi\nu\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\mu\alpha\tau\iota$ that the apostle is present among the Colossians.

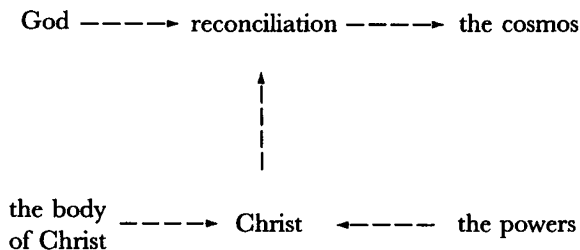
It should be emphasized that the mandate of this sequence "fits" with and within that of the correlated sequences inasmuch as the content of its Object, the gospel of Christ that Paul imparts (via his associates) to the Colossians, includes ideationally the good news of what God is accomplishing through Christ in the correlated sequences. It fits, too, inasmuch as the fulfillment of Paul's subcontract can be understood as a component of the main contract's final realization. The two mandates correspond, too, in that they both have the same Sender, God.

The second topical sequence focuses on the narrative elements of the third story line, the tale of Christianity in the Lycus River valley as we learn of it from the epistle. Here another subprotagonist appears, the readers themselves:



The submandate evident here involves God's summoning the Colossians to have faith in Jesus Christ and to be obedient to Christ as Lord according to the gospel proclaimed to them by Paul and Epaphras. God's call and the Colossians' response to this call in baptism constitute the subcontract of this narrative network. The positioning of characters in this sequence corresponds with the sorts of actantial patterns that generally govern the way that the different sequences of a narrative relate to one another. Specifically, in this topical sequence we see that the Subject of the correlated sequences, who is the main protagonist, Christ, has now become the Receiver. To Christ is given faith and obedience by the Colossian Christians. Aiding them in this action above all is the gospel, the Helper, by which I mean both those people who bear and embody the authentic gospel, Paul and his fellow workers, and the power of God present in the gospel to renew the believer and sustain the body of Christ. Opposing the genuine faith that the Colossians have in Christ is the philosophy, which deceives them into thinking according to human standards and not holding fast to Christ. We could include in the opposition as well "the old human being" with its practices, which resists the human renewal that God accomplishes in Christ.

As in all stories, the actantial structure of the final sequence in Colossians parallels that of the initial sequence:



The crucial difference here, in comparison with the initial sequence, is two-fold. First, the action of the final sequence belongs to the time

of eschatological judgment, when Christ's glorious victory will be revealed and God's plan of redemption will be completed. Second, insofar as the Colossians have accepted God's call as imparted by the Pauline gospel and, in accordance with this gospel, have been baptized and have lived in Christ, they are now members of the body, which is assigned the position of Helper in the diagram. The alteration, growth, or "improvement" in the Helper from the initial to the topical sequence follows regularly anticipated patterns for the actantial model of a story. This change, though, does not mean that the Colossians' "assistance" in their capacity as members of the body, the church, is in some sense necessary to God's cosmic victory or the completion of the mandate of the correlated sequences. What this change does indicate is that the inclusion of the Colossians in the body is part of God's plan, and that their participation and destiny as members of the body belong not only to the sphere of the submandates within the narrative action of the topical sequences but also and most importantly to the narrative action of the correlated sequences, God's contract to subjugate the cosmic powers and to reconcile the world through Christ.

The inspection of Colossians' narrative substructure according to the actantial model developed by Greimas reveals a number of its key features, some of which have already been mentioned. In light of this structural analysis, we observe that the text's worldview is determined to a significant extent by how different major elements within it are defined and related to one another either by contract or confrontation, and how these contracts and confrontations are resolved. In terms of this model, the hallmarks of the story posited by the epistle's symbolic universe appear in the identification of the three mandates and the delineation of how these mandates function together in a coherent manner: God accomplishes reconciliation through the cross of Christ, Paul is commissioned by God to proclaim the gospel, the Colossians are called by God to be baptized and to live the gospel.⁶⁷ All three contracts are initiated by God, all three relate to the revelation of God's mystery, and all three advance God's cosmic plan of victory and redemption. All three involve God's contracting with a protagonist, each with a distinct mission and a distinct sphere of operation. Each protagonist must overcome an opposition associated with the cosmic elements and their power over people. For each protagonist a "Helper" can be identified, in accordance with

⁶⁷ With this we might compare the intersection of the sacred, the mundane, and the personal dimensions of narrative experience as discussed by Crites, "Narrative Quality," 81-84.

the divine plan. The application of the model is useful, too, because it shows that the agents of the story (including the readers) are defined not simply by who they are but especially by what they do, their function in the plot. In other words, the characterization of actants in Greimas' analysis is action-centered, though it should be emphasized that the actantial structure alone does not reveal all the details and motivations of such action.⁶⁸

We can see, then, how this narrative structure, based upon contract and conflict, furnishes a framework and point of reference for evaluating all elements and events mentioned in the letter. The actions to which the author refers ought not to be evaluated as isolated bits of behavior independent of the agent's life, beliefs, and settings, but must be understood as components of a narrative history that expresses worldview. This makes the moral values that guide these actions more intelligible and plausible, creating a mechanism for critical engagement. As the readers of the letter become involved in the process of recognizing this underlying scheme for explaining reality, they are able to observe in their own local, particular story certain universal principles of ultimate importance, principles which must become the raw material of their own self-identity and moral purpose if they are to succeed.

Aristotle, among many others, supposed that narrative functions to persuade in part by reasoning analogically. Our analysis has specified some lines of analogy between Colossians' different stories, suggesting something of the logic and argumentative power present in the overall narrative substructure as it speaks to the decision-making of the audience.⁶⁹ Colossians fashions a narrative consciousness for its recipients that assists them in bridging in their own experience the events and received wisdom of the past with the challenge of the present situation, all with a view to the response that the future demands.⁷⁰ In this enterprise, the person and teaching of the apostle function in a critical capacity, especially insofar as Paul, in fulfilling his contract, links the cosmic, divine order of things with the local, social order of the recipients.⁷¹

⁶⁸ There is an inherent danger in this variety of analysis insofar as it assumes the typicality of character development – actants are understood mostly as products of how they behave within the confines of a basic structure, rather than as autonomous, complex personages. The discussion above in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 has suggested some of these complexities; cf. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 111-126.

⁶⁹ McGuire, "Narrative Persuasion," 163-178.

⁷⁰ Cf. Crites, "Narrative Quality," 78.

⁷¹ Cf. Petersen, *Rediscovering Paul*, 60.

As we learned earlier, Walter Fisher has argued that any specimen of narration (which for him would be virtually any instance of serious communication) is evaluated by its readers according to the logic of “good reasons.” By this he means those elements of the story that provide warrants for adopting its values and recommendations, components of the story that authorize for the readers certain moral judgments and behavior. For the good reasons provided by the author of Colossians, however we might identify and describe them, it appears that they must be determined in light of their coherence with this scheme of contract and conflict. Anything that contributes to the fulfillment of the contracts or aids the protagonists would constitute a “good reason” for moral action. This criterion provides a key interpretive framework and interpretive tool for evaluating the various rules, maxims, symbols, and traditions conveyed by the text, many of which, as we have seen, are not distinctively Christian in content.⁷² The analysis above indicates for the author’s story a strong sense of coherence, of authorization, and of closure. These features, in turn, make the letter’s appeal more persuasive morally, inasmuch as its story fits certain expectations ordinarily associated with narration, and inasmuch as this story makes the moral concepts imbedded in it more tangible and lucid. The content of the text, even the material of its moral recommendations, then, can be borrowed and shared with other ethical traditions and sources of insight; the distinctiveness is to be ascertained in how the moral ideas and rules function in and contribute to the story, how they operate in the lives of the agents that belong to that story.⁷³ The story of Colossians recommends itself in a rather cogent fashion, then, to the readers as what should be their own story. As they live this story, they situate themselves in accordance with God’s plan and are able to negotiate their relationship with the world around them – with its own norms, perspectives, and stories – in a manner that reflects and confirms this reality.

⁷² Cf. Meeks, *Origins*, 196.

⁷³ Cf. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 205, 208, 215-216; Paul Nelson, *Narrative and Morality: A Theological Inquiry* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987) 10-13, 19, 25.

CHAPTER SIX

SHAPING THE MESSAGE

In the preceding chapter, we exposed the basic contours of the story (and stories) embedded in the epistle to the Colossians, suggesting how it operates paraenetically, and making some observations as to how this narrative substructure (as it was called) imparts the text's Christian worldview. Yet, while narrative forces may indeed be at work helping to weave the author's symbolic universe, it is plain that Colossians, in terms of the type of message it communicates to the reader directly, does not belong to a narrative genre; nor are the principles that govern its form and style primarily narrative in character. Instead, the document ought to be classified as an instance of epistolary paraenesis, and the criteria that govern its design and manner of presentation are consistent with those associated with ancient writings that also belong to this category. As recent studies have shown, epistolary paraenesis was in fact a fairly common literary style and genre in antiquity, one that was even recommended in conjunction with secondary education.¹ As we have learned in this study, it was also employed to substantial benefit by Greco-Roman educators from virtually every philosophic school.² As an example of this genre and style, and in light of what has been said so far about the letter and its contents, the literary character of Colossians can be evaluated in terms of comparison with other paraenetic documents from antiquity, epistolary and philosophic materials in particular.

In taking on this type of comparative and analytical investigation, we turn to the question of the literary composition of Colossians, its "surface" structure or "superstructure." In terms of our discussion in Chapter Five, a detailed description of this superstructure is informative and necessary because it reveals how the author conveys to the readers the story that belongs to the text's substructure.³ More

¹ For example, Pseudo-Libanius, in *Ἐπιστολιμαῖοι Χαρακτήρες* 5, 52, describes a paraenetic style (παραινετική) for letter-writing; on this manual see Koskenniemi, *Studien*, 56; Malherbe, *Theorists*, 1-11, 66-81; cf. Stowers, *Letter-Writing*, 94-106.

² See above, pp. 47-50.

³ This issue of the literary composition of the letter relates to the "textual" ordering of its contents, as opposed to the "chronological" ordering, a distinction made earlier in talking about the different ways an author's narrative can be imparted; see above, pp. 192-194.

than this, though, the arguments and ideas that drive the composition of the letter indicate what the story is intended to accomplish as part of Colossians' paraenetic and epistolary transaction. In other words, it is through the literary or surface structure of the text – its direct communication with the readers – that the letter-writer provides the audience with an assessment of the story and its relevance to their present state-of-affairs, weighing the import of its many elements and events. The criteria that determine the text's literary composition – criteria selected and controlled by the pseudepigrapher – present and interpret the story from "Paul's" point of view. The artistic application of these criteria are what in effect convert the substance and significance of the story into direct expression, as its rhetorical and normative aspects come to the fore. By means of the literary style and shape of the message, the direct communication of the text, the author wants to prove his version of the story to be "true" – true to the aspirations and experiences of the audience. In conjunction with this, the writer's interpretation and judgments regarding the story reveal not only his literary and rhetorical skills, but also impute to each figure of the narrative certain moral characteristics and values, as the general "truths" of the story achieve explicit form.⁴

The importance of addressing such literary questions within the context of our historically-guided interpretation of the epistle should be underscored up front. Colossians, like any text of the New Testament, can be interpreted in relation to existing literary practices and contemporaneous conventions for linguistic logic and organization. These practices and conventions relate to the implicit and often subconscious "rules" that writers and readers obey for the production and interpretation of any particular type, or genre, of discourse. The matter of investigating the literary genre and composition of Colossians, then, does not just represent a scholarly exercise in taxonomy, but is fundamental for coming to terms with its intended purpose and hermeneutic, its place in the corpus of ancient literature, and the manner in which the constituent ideas and forms of the text correlate with one another to create a cogent and organic whole. For interpreters of the letter, both ancient and modern, prior assumptions regarding to which category and mode of communication the text belongs govern to a significant extent how they think it is to be read and what nature of response is expected from the reader to its message.⁵ The objective for the analysis that follows is to as-

⁴ Cf. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 196 ff.

⁵ Cf. Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

certain as far as possible what sorts of literary expectations the original recipients might have brought to their encounter with the letter and what this suggests about the nature of the letter's contents and function. Such considerations are especially important if we want to describe in more precise terms how the text sought to impact the moral thought and behavior of its first-century audience. With this in mind, we can understand more exactly how it is that the *dramatis personae* of Colossians which we have been examining (in the first-, second-, and third-persons) are accessible in a meaningful way to the reader only insofar as they function within the literary parameters and objectives of the letter.

Modes of Paraenetic Address and Paraenetic Composition

In his recent commentary on Colossians, Jean-Noël Aletti surveys some prominent modern theories concerning the literary structure of the letter.⁶ In terms of historical and literary presuppositions, methodology, and results, these analyses differ conspicuously from one another, prompting the observation that no modern consensus exists as to the letter's design, even when it comes to resolving basic questions. The guiding principle for the examination of Colossians in this chapter, as throughout our study, is that the nature of the letter's presentation can be effectively explained through comparison with paraenetic texts circulating in contemporaneous philosophic schools. Before presenting yet another analysis of the epistle, therefore, some preliminary remarks are in order as to the ideas and methods that seem to have informed the composition of philosophic paraenesis in antiquity.

As we have seen, paraenetic authors could address their readers in different ways and with different tones and styles, each of which would be appropriate to one or more specific objectives associated with moral exhortation. These would include but not be limited to an author's instructing, reminding, warning, praising, commanding, or consoling his or her audience. Also the paraenetic customs of description, explanation, critique, and defense belong to the ways that an author could effectively speak to a group of students. The discussion of paraenetic texts in previous chapters of this study has indicat-

⁶ Aletti, *Colossians*, 33-42; a comparison shows Aletti's own analysis to be the most sophisticated of those presented; cf. Wolter, *Brief*, 114-116; mention can be made also of the (rather impenetrable) attempt to reveal the "discourse structure" of Colossians by Wilbur Pickering, *A Framework for Discourse Analysis* (Dallas: University of Texas at Arlington, 1980).

ed some of the varied manners in which these divers "modes of address" (as they will be called) could play a role in a paraenetic appeal. In any single instance of paraenesis, the presence, extent, and precise application of these "modes" will be determined by a number of factors associated with the situation that prompts its creation. These factors will include the various personal roles assumed by the paraenetic writer, the condition and status of the readers as neophytes in the movement, and the specific issues and obstacles encountered by both the author and the audience.⁷ The decision of an author as to which modes of address to use and how they should be applied and combined to form a coherent paraenetic message will correspond to the particular literary forms and principles of literary organization that govern the composition. The diversity in modes of address is suggestive of the complexity of the psychagogic enterprise to which paraenetic discourse tends; it also serves as an indication of the multi-faceted nature of paraenesis as a literary endeavor. Nevertheless, with the task of examining the literary structure of *Colossians* in mind, it may be possible to distinguish a limited number of basic and overarching paraenetic "modes" which relate to the fundamental aims of philosophic education. In fact, a survey of examples of philosophic paraenesis indicates that three modes of paraenetic address predominate, though other modes of address can be identified. These three will be referred to as paraenetic affirmation, paraenetic correction, and paraenetic exhortation.

With the first of these, paraenetic affirmation, the author, acting as a guide and teacher, concentrates on a mode of address that seeks to affirm and validate for the readers the teachings of the philosophic movement. Naturally, it is beyond the scope of paraenetic discourse for the sage to name and confirm all the movement's tenets and concepts. The focus, instead, is on highly selective reminders of those aspects of the movement's ideology that are most pertinent to the case at hand and which support the text's moral appeal.

In this affirming mode of paraenesis, authors generally select for elaboration one or more of three related topics. For example, the affirmation of a paraenetic message will typically relay something about the content of the author's ideology, specifically those traditions that convey and preserve that ideology. Here, the highlighting of key doctrinal formulae, concepts, and materials is common, as the teacher avows certain dogmas and philosophic principles that are relevant to the addressees' development. The tone of this presentation may be both positive and negative in orientation: positive, in the

⁷ Cf. Malherbe, "Pastoral Care," 382.

sense of confirming the factuality and beneficial quality of the master's ideological position; negative, in the sense of asserting the superiority of the philosophy's worldview over its competitors. A second possible topic for affirmation pertains to the authoritative revealers and bearers of the movement's teaching and to the reliable means of its transmission to the readers. In this case the author is often the center of attention. Some description of his role vis-à-vis the audience as teacher, mystagogue, friend, role-model, and embodiment of the movement's ideals may be included. The author may also seek to assure the students of the divine and ancient quality of his knowledge, and of the completeness and accuracy with which this has been passed on to the students. A third subject for affirmation concerns the positive manner in which the movement's teaching and teachers have impacted the lives of the students, amending their intellectual, moral, and personal status. Approving declarations of this variety encourage the readers to reflect on their own progress, to maintain their course, and to strengthen their relationship with like-minded individuals, including the author.

When engaged in paraenetic correction, philosophers busy themselves with identifying the shortcomings and failures evident in the positions advanced by others and with providing pupils with the information necessary to reject these positions and avoid the moral offenses that they occasion. As we learned in Chapter Four, in a paraenetic context correction and critique may assume numerous forms, taking into account issues of both theory and practice. The teacher may aim his correcting remarks directly at the recipients, pointing out areas where they have fallen short in their progress or need to change, or at some third party, whose untoward influence threatens the schooling and welfare of the readers. Occasionally, we encounter even a sort of self-correction, where the writer identifies points of disagreement with others in the movement, challenging the students to rethink their assumptions or to align themselves with one opinion over another. Correction will customarily demonstrate a negative character, as writers criticize and denounce opposing views, though apparently a positive side was also frequently deemed necessary. As part of their correction, paraenetic authors will depict for the readers a superior way or a better explanation. In so doing, they reveal the inadequacies of false opinions and harmful behavior through comparison and contrast with positions the students have been taught to accept.

To be sure, exhortation as a mode or style of communication might be said to characterize paraenesis *per se*, since direct (and often extended) appeal for action, cast in the form of imperatives

and imperatival surrogates, is integral to the purpose of paraenetic discourse. But, as we have seen, there are often substantial segments of paraenetic writings that do not consist of this mode of address and paraenetic writers rarely present their readers with just one demand after another. It might be fair to say, instead, that one of the chief concerns of paraenesis is to furnish an overall conceptual framework in which the author's behests to think and behave in certain ways make sense in light of the recipient's situation and experience. For this reason, it is prudent to classify exhortation as a distinct mode of paraenetic address. Here, the philosopher aims most clearly at the concrete actualization of the movement's ideas in the daily conduct of the audience. This is that part of a discourse where the teacher articulates explicitly the response expected of the readers. As a consequence, the specifically moral concepts, traditions, and terminology of the movement tend to come to the fore here. Exhortation in this sense can be conveyed both positively (demands as to what the readers should think and do) and negatively (injunctions to refrain from certain attitudes and behavior).

An examination of the primary materials themselves supports the appropriateness of these categories for describing the forms and functions of paraenetic address, though manifold permutations and developments can be observed in individual examples. Some especially useful observations on this matter of the structuring of paraenetic texts occur in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* 94 and 95, which (as stated earlier) are among the few Hellenistic documents that reflect programmatically and in detail on the peculiar properties of paraenesis and its basic role in the traditions of philosophic guidance.

The specific subject for the ninety-fourth epistle is that department of philosophy known as *praecepta*, by which Seneca means moral exhortation, advice, and admonition (especially in the form of maxims and proverbs) which is germane to the special circumstances and station in life of the recipients as a practical aid to the inculcation of virtue and the observance of moral duties.⁸ Seneca contends (responding to the contrary views of thinkers like the Stoic philosopher Aristo of Chius) that exhortation of this quality does in fact occupy a proper place in philosophic guidance, provided that its application is accompanied by and takes into account other essential measures. Seneca's arguments in support of this contention imply for the character of philosophic education a three-fold approach, three inter-related and complementary areas of concern to which the

⁸ Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 94.1, 14-16, 22-23, 25-30, 33-34, 39-40, 44, 47, 50-51 (cf. 95.1).

philosophic guide must tend when instructing neophytes.⁹ To be sure, Seneca nowhere identifies this three-fold program as such, though numerous comments within the discussion appear to presume such a scheme. Perhaps his interaction with the citation of a rival viewpoint in §§ 32-34 furnishes the clearest example: "Expel false opinions concerning Good and Evil, and replace them with true opinions. Then *admonitio* will have no function." Seneca is in complete agreement as to the student's need – identified in the first sentence of the quotation – to (1) expel false opinions and (2) learn true ones. However, he maintains – against the second sentence of the quotation – that (3) precepts do indeed support the entire enterprise, since even if one's mind is under good control, it can nevertheless be "inactive and untrained in finding the path of duty" (§ 32). Here paraenesis can show the way, as part of an overall process of training. Seneca's arguments throughout *Epistulae Morales* 94 and 95 outline the underlying principles and objectives of this training.

First, it is necessary to drive out corrupt opinions regarding human existence and incorrect ideas about the nature of the world, eliminating from the initiate any ignorance, self-deceit, or evil passion that might beget moral faults. The philosophic guide must expel mistaken beliefs from his pupils, remove the conceit of wisdom, and separate them from corrupting influences. The main weapons for this battle, according to Seneca, are the *decreta*, the dogmas, teachings, and tenets of the philosophic movement, which disperse the cloud of error from the students' minds and heal the sicknesses of their souls.¹⁰

Second, and in conjunction with this, students must acquire the proper attitude and judgment, inculcate the ultimate standard of truth, and develop the will to act correctly. They must not only learn philosophic principles concerning good and evil, renouncing invalid opinions, but they are also to create for themselves a sound state of mind. Here again the *decreta* play a vital role. Once instilled, they equip students with the means of distinguishing right from wrong and show why one must act morally. The teachings of the movement construct for the individual an ordered view of the whole of life and the universe in its completeness. This supplies for students an understanding of their place and potential in the world.¹¹

Third, and in conjunction with all of this, there is moral exhortation, or *praecepta*. Removing dangerous beliefs and learning the cor-

⁹ On this scheme cf. Jordan, "Protreptic," 316-318.

¹⁰ Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 94.4-7, 13, 21, 33-34.

¹¹ Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 94.12, 33-34, 49-50, 95.10-12, 34-41, 43-46, 56-59.

rect tenets do not automatically and at once create insight as to the art of living in all its complexity. Precepts are useful to philosophic guidance, says Seneca, because they help to set in order one's moral obligations, aiding in the perfection of virtue as one continues to make progress within the philosophic system. Even after they have overthrown ignorance and vice, acquired the proper worldview and the will to do what is right, students will grapple (probably throughout their lives) with the arduous task of learning what they ought to do in each situation and how it is to be done. Following precepts gives the student assistance in this task, helping to reinforce correct ideas while keeping depraved ones in check.¹²

To be sure, Seneca does not envision the neophyte as progressing through each of these three areas of guidance serially, one after another. On the contrary, taken together they identify the main components and objectives of the philosophic life in its entirety, even for an advanced student like Lucilius. Seneca's discussion in these epistles indicates that the three approaches must work cooperatively in order to be successful. It is hardly worthwhile for one to discharge base opinions but to have no vision of the *summum bonum* with which to replace them or any realistic plan for how to achieve it. Likewise, to learn proper *decreta* without making sustained efforts to stamp out corruption and vice results in nothing but moral discrepancy and hypocrisy. Finally, simply to behave acceptably without understanding why can hardly be described as virtuous or commendable, and is insufficient for curing the soul of ignorance and vice.

It should come as no surprise that Seneca's reflection on the most advantageous method for philosophic education and the place of moral exhortation in that system manifests itself in the design of many of his paraenetic letters. In *Epistulae Morales* 16, for instance, a three-part literary structure is evident, with each unit corresponding to one of the three pedagogical matters presupposed in Seneca's presentation in letters 94 and 95.

The first unit of the letter, §§ 1-3, concentrates on paraenetic affirmation, developing several related topics. Seneca opens in § 1 with a principle of Stoic teaching that he acknowledges is already well-known and self-evident to Lucilius, namely, that the pursuit of wisdom is the essence of the philosophic life, the only thing which leads to true happiness. Seneca affirms the centrality of this idea by calling on Lucilius to persevere in his commitment to wisdom, to strengthen his conviction through regular meditation, study, and effort. The statements of § 2 continue in the affirming mode of address, though

¹² Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 94.21, 23, 30-31, 33-34, 36, 48-51.

at this point the focus shifts more to the positive and edifying nature of the teacher-student relationship enjoyed by Seneca and his protégé. As Lucilius' mentor, the letter-writer recognizes his earnestness and applauds his progress, admitting that there is no longer any real need for lengthy "affirmations" (*affirmatione*) on the elder's part. Nevertheless, and in keeping with the paraenetic style, Seneca encourages his correspondent to do more and not to grow complacent. As the teacher puts it, he has "hope" (*spes*) but not yet perfect trust for his friend so far as his character development goes. Lucilius can improve even more if he continues to examine and scrutinize himself, so that his progress will be measured not by the false notions of the world, but by the true standards of philosophy. This contrast becomes the point of departure for what may be described as a short encomium on philosophy in § 3, a paragraph that extols the magnificence of philosophy, seeking to bolster the reader's dedication to its values and vocation. We can assume that virtually nothing is stated here that would be new to Lucilius or (for that matter) to any philosophic initiate. Philosophy, says Seneca, is not a trivial matter of eloquence or amusement or self-aggrandizement, but constitutes the supreme force for shaping the soul, ordering all of life, and directing one's moral purpose, furnishing for those who embrace it peace of mind and trustworthy advice for every hour of existence. With this sort of inspiring language, Seneca identifies and describes for Lucilius both the highest goal and the defining characteristic of their movement, affirming what the movement stands for and how it accomplishes its objectives.

In the next unit, the shortest of the letter (§§ 4-5), Seneca responds to and corrects a potential objection to his praise of philosophy. The section begins with the "quotation" of an anonymous and imaginary interlocutor, who questions the value of philosophy in a world where Fate (or god or Chance) controls the course of all events, blocking the ability of mortals to influence their future (§ 4). The author counters with the thesis that even if human destiny is governed by some inexorable force or entity, philosophy remains the individual's best defense: "She will encourage us to obey god cheerfully, but Fortune defiantly" (§ 5). Regardless of one's worldview or opinion as to the factors that determine the nature of existence, philosophy will always prove to be the most true and beneficial course.¹³

The letter's final and longest unit (§§ 6-9) consists primarily of moral advice and instruction. At this point the expectation of a moral response comes to light in its most tangible and distinct sense.

¹³ Cf. Seneca, *De Consolatione ad Helviam* 17.5.

The content, which is traditional and unexceptional, attends only to a narrowly defined area of moral life, though the principles articulated in support have wider ramifications for learning Stoic ethics. The first sentence of § 6 represents a transition to the new mode of address. It is not Seneca's point, he says, to dwell on the question of how much of life is within human control. He continues instead with his original and main theme, which is framed both positively and negatively: "I return now to my warning and my exhortation (*mon-eam et exhorter*), that you should not allow the impulse of your spirit to weaken and grow cold. Hold fast to it and establish it firmly." In the remainder of the text, Seneca offers advice pertaining to a specific area of Lucilius' moral behavior as it reflects on his ongoing philosophical vocation. By heeding this appeal, Lucilius' comportment can match his convictions, helping to establish and strengthen his commitment to philosophy. The basis of Seneca's exhortation is a maxim culled from the Epicurean corpus (as he reminds us, in his moral discourse he is wont to borrow in this manner from "other men's property").¹⁴ The precept cited in § 7 relates to and supports the distinction between the standards of philosophy and those of the general public made in §§ 2-3, specifying some of its concrete implications for morality: "if you live according to nature, you will never be poor, if you live according to opinion, you will never be rich." The ensuing explanation shows the practical import of the gnome, illustrating how this recommendation applies to the recipient's behavior both positively and negatively. In § 8, we have the application of the precept to a specific area of conduct. Seneca warns that the desire for wealth and property, because it is unnatural and senseless, based upon false opinion, can never be satisfied and therefore often leads to frustration and ruin. On the other hand, natural desires are limited and easily met (§ 9a). The master condenses these observations into a rule for everyday conduct, which concludes the letter:

Recall your steps, therefore, from idle things, and when you would know whether that which you seek is based upon a natural or upon a misleading desire, consider whether it can stop at any definite point. If you find...that there is a more distant goal always in view, you may be sure that this condition is contrary to nature (§ 9b).

To sum up: the design and orientation of *Epistulae Morales* 16 evidence a host of features that are common to the type of literary design identified earlier. We note that within the three-part structure emphasis (in terms of both length and importance) is placed on affirmation and exhortation, and that all three segments tend to be most-

¹⁴ Again typical of the paraenetic style; cf. above, pp. 96, 108-109.

ly positive and hopeful in their bearing towards the reader. Even in the correcting mode of address, Seneca's strategy consists of a positive assessment of the impact that philosophy's teachings can have on human existence in the face of potential detractors or opposing worldviews. For the most part, Seneca wants Lucilius to recognize that he is on the right path, and to understand fully what this entails in every instance. In this spirit Seneca avers the sum and substance of the philosophic life adopted by the pupil, including reminders of its goals, benefits, teachings, and methods. The master also affirms Lucilius' personal progress with respect to the philosophic regimen and the positive impact that he himself continues to have on that progress. Nevertheless, much of the author's ideological formulations are presented dialectically (self-advancement vs. fatalism, nature vs. opinion, wisdom vs. greed, etc.). The belief-system and moral course espoused by Seneca are set against those advanced by the world at large in a fashion that underlines the ongoing challenge posed to the serious student. The principal weapons marshaled by the author in aiding Lucilius to meet this challenge are reminders that point to the ideology and worldview of the movement and suggest how they are to inform practical conduct.¹⁵

The Composition of Colossians

The discussion above supplies us with a point of comparison for the study of Colossians' literary structure. Our primary thesis is that the letter manifests a three-fold structure comparable to that detected in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* 16. According to this interpretation, Colossians 1.3-2.7 (Section I) constitutes paraenetic affirmation, 2.8-23 (Section II) paraenetic correction, and 3.1-4.6 (Section III) paraenetic exhortation, with 1.1-2 and 4.7-18 forming the text's epistolary framework. These major literary units of the epistle correspond to the principal paraenetic functions evident in the author's appeal. The presence of such a structure helps to corroborate the observation that Colossians should be interpreted as an example of ancient paraenesis.

My plan for investigating the literary composition of Colossians according to this proposal is simply to proceed through the letter starting at the beginning, examining each of the major segments in turn.

¹⁵ Considerations of space preclude the examination of other comparative samples, though cf. Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 13, 32, 34, 42, 50, 53; Pseudo-Anacharsis, *Epistulae* 5, 9; Pseudo-Crates, *Epistulae* 16, 20, 32, 33, 35; Pseudo-Diogenes, *Epistulae* 9, 10, 27, 34, 39, 46; Pseudo-Heraclitus, *Epistulae* 8, 9; *Socraticorum Epistulae* 21.

Colossians 1.1-2 – To its intended audience, the first two verses of the text would have been immediately recognizable as the epistolary prescript. In a manner consistent with the conventions for the opening of an ancient letter, the unit includes an identification of the letter's co-senders (Paul and Timothy) followed by an indication of the communication's intended recipients (the saints in Colossae) and lastly a brief salutation conveyed by the former to the latter. It should be noted additionally that all three of these standard elements exhibit particular features familiar from the epistolary prescripts of the undisputed Pauline correspondence, making use of standard titles and designations that connote the Christian status of the parties included in the epistolary exchange and formulating the epistolary salutation in the manner of a Christian benediction.¹⁶

As one might expect, the substance and form of the prescript play a determinative role for the interpretation of the letter's message in its entirety. It does so not only in its capacity as the text's introduction but especially insofar as it reveals the quality and underlying function of the document, naming the principal characters involved (Paul, the Colossians, God) and establishing the basic parameters of its subject matter and the overarching manner of its discourse. Specifically, we have here a piece of official communication written and dispatched by recognized leaders of the Christian church to a Christian community that is in some sense under their authority. With regard to its general character, 1.1-2 is to be distinguished from those elements that make up the body of the letter (1.3-4.6) and bear its message, linking up with the epistolary postscript (4.7-18), which in a similarly conventionalized style provides basic information as to the text's purpose as a letter and particularly as a piece of formal Christian epistolary communication.¹⁷

At the same time, the terms, ideas, and even the theological statements conveyed by the prescript relate in a meaningful way to the message of the letter-body.¹⁸ In this regard we should recognize the

¹⁶ In terms of form and content the epistolary prescript in II Corinthians 1.1-2 appears to be the most similar of those in the Pauline corpus. On the Pauline epistolary prescript see Franz Schnider and Werner Stenger, *Studien zum neutestamentlichen Briefformular* (NTTS 11; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987) 3-41. On opening epistolary benedictions see Klaus Berger, "Apostelbrief und apostolische Rede: Zum Formular frühchristlicher Briefe," *ZNW* 65 (1974) 191-207; Gordon P. Wiles, *Paul's Intercessory Prayers: The Significance of the Intercessory Prayer Passages in the Letters of St. Paul* (SNTSMS 24; London, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974) 108-114.

¹⁷ See below, pp. 252-254.

¹⁸ By "letter-body" I mean that main, central portion of a letter which conveys the author's message, the primary information to be communicated, as opposed to secondary information regarding the participants and circumstances of the episto-

connection between Colossians 1.1-2 and the material that immediately follows in 1.3-2.7. As I will discuss below, the author in this passage concentrates on affirming certain relevant and positive features of the Christian gospel, specifically those aspects that pertain to the content of the gospel, to Paul as the bearer of the gospel, and to the readers as those who have received and been transformed by the gospel. Inasmuch as the prescript anticipates and (to some extent) announces these three key themes of the section, it is possible to discern in one particular sense how the text's epistolary and paraenetic objectives dovetail.

As for the specifics, it is manifest from the outset that the pseudopigrapher intends to remind the recipients of Paul's credentials. The purported author is not just any individual but, as an "apostle of Christ Jesus" who has been summoned to this post "in accordance with God's will," Paul's ministry possesses sanctioned (and perhaps unique) status. His communication to the addressees is supported by the co-sender, Timothy, one of the apostle's special associates. Next, the letter-writer has Paul acknowledge the good standing of the recipients with respect to both the gospel and himself. The members of the Colossian community are referred to as "holy and faithful brothers in Christ."¹⁹ Finally, the epistolary benediction hints at some of the fundamental tenets of the gospel to which the author and the audience, as Christians, owe allegiance, namely, that there is one God who is "our father" (cf. 1.3, 12) and that God is the ultimate and only true source of grace and peace for the readers (cf. 1.6, 11, 20). Furthermore, the benediction, constituting as it does a form of intercessory prayer and blessing, anticipates and creates a transition to the thanksgiving and intercessory prayers that occupy 1.3 ff.

Section I: Colossians 1.3-2.7 – In examining these prayers, we turn to the first major section of the letter-body, 1.3-2.7, which consists of two major subsections, 1.3-2.3 and 1.24-2.5, concluded with a summary and transition in 2.6-7. These two subsections are distinguished from the rest of the letter functionally by their focus on affirmation and from one another on account of the nature of the constituent elements employed to express the affirmation. The first unit, 1.3-2.3, concentrates primarily (but not exclusively) on affirming certain beliefs regarding the gospel and the positive impact which the gospel has had for the readers. The author conveys this affirma-

lary exchange. For discussion see John L. White, *The Form and Function of the Body of the Greek Letter: A Study of the Letter-Body in the Non-Literary Papyri and in Paul the Apostle* (2nd ed.; SBLDS 2; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1972).

¹⁹ The "in Christ" formula is used also in 1.4, 28.

tion above all through the application of materials that appear to be confessional in spirit: prayer-reports in 1.3 ff., 1.9 ff., and the hymn of 1.15 ff.²⁰ The second unit, 1.24-2.5, in turn concentrates primarily (but not exclusively) on affirming the person and work of Paul in terms of both his relationship to the gospel (as the one who suffers as he reveals the mystery to all people in accordance with his divine commission) and his relationship with the Colossian Christians (as a concerned and present teacher). The affirmation in this subsection is expressed chiefly by means of an apostolic self-commendation and through epistolary disclosure statements.²¹

Colossians 1.3-23 – This passage is comprised of four units, all of which are inspired to some degree by liturgical or confessional materials of the church. Their common, underlying function is evident in efforts to affirm the veracity and divine power of the gospel, the trustworthiness of its official bearers, and the manifold benefits it conveys on Christians everywhere, particularly the readers. The traditional nature of the author's language, ideas, means of expression, and even sources is well documented by the commentaries. We have first the report of a prayer of thanksgiving in 1.3-8, followed by the report of a prayer of intercession in 1.9-14, which segues into the Christ-hymn of verses 15-20, to which the author has attached an explanatory segment that shows the application of the hymn's essential points to the life-history of the readers (1.21-23) and transitions to the second main subsection in 1.24 ff.

While these different segments may be distinguished on account of their particular subject-matter and objectives, the organic quality of the whole passage should be underscored. Thus the thanksgiving of 1.3 ff. includes (and is incomplete without) the intercession of 1.9 ff. This in turn flows into another thanksgiving in 1.12 ff. (actually a summons to thanksgiving; see below), which does not reach any plain conclusion until 1.23, which echoes a number of key themes that had introduced the unit, giving us an example of *inclusio*, a prevalent literary device in ancient literature for circumscribing the boundaries of a discrete section of text.²² So, with regard to 1.3-23, both the beginning (1.3-6) and the conclusion of the passage (1.23) include references to the faith (πίστις) and the hope (ἐλπίς) of the au-

²⁰ The use of hymnic and poetic materials, usually of a traditional nature, is in keeping with the paraenetic style, e.g., Pseudo-Diogenes, *Epistulae* 7.2; Musonius Rufus, *Fragmenta* 9.45.7-9; Epictetus, *Diatribae* 3.10.2-3 (cf. 1.16.15-21), *Encheiridion* 53; Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 17.9 (cf. 7.97-102); Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 101.11, 107.11 (cf. 16.3, discussed above); Iamblichus, *De Vita Pythagorica* 14.63, 35.259.

²¹ Cf. Schnider and Stenger, *Studien*, 59-62, 67-68.

²² See Wilson, *Love*, s.v. *inclusio*; idem, *Mysteries*, s.v. *inclusio*.

dience (1.4-5 and 23) and to the gospel (εὐαγγέλιον, 1.5 and 23) which it "heard" (προηκούσατε in 1.5, ἠκούσατε in 1.6 and 23) and which is being proclaimed and growing throughout the world (ἐν παντί τῷ κόσμῳ in 1.6, cf. ἐν πάσῃ κτίσει τῇ ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν in 1.23).²³

The first of the four units located in 1.3-23 transmits the report of an ongoing prayer of thanksgiving to God (1.3-8) offered by Paul and Timothy, expressing their appreciation for every good thing that God has accomplished for the Colossian Christians through the gospel.²⁴ Both the positioning of the thanksgiving-report (at the opening of the letter-body) and its internal structure correspond with Pauline epistolary custom.²⁵ Insofar as it announces a number of key themes for the letter, and for the first major section of the letter-body in particular, the composition of the thanksgiving also corresponds with Pauline practice. Three themes here seem to be of special importance for what follows: prayer and thanksgiving directed towards God, the faith, love, and hope that the Colossians experience in Christ, and the gospel itself, which is described as "the word of truth" through which one learns "God's grace in truth" and which is bearing fruit in the community just as it is throughout the world.²⁶

As for its composition, the Colossian thanksgiving reveals a seven-part structure, comparable in type to those in Philippians 1.3-11 and Philemon 4-6.²⁷ In Colossians, the first five elements of this structure occur in verse 3, some of which are reiterated in verse 9: the section opens with a verb of thanksgiving (εὐχαριστοῦμεν, "we give thanks"), then the identification of whom is thanked ("God the father of our Lord Jesus Christ"), an indication as to the frequency of the thanksgiving (πάντοτε, "always," cf. οὐ παύομεθα, "we do not stop" in verse 9), and on whose behalf it is undertaken (that is, the readers: περὶ ὑμῶν, cf. ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν in verse 9). The fifth element found in verse 3 is the temporal participle προσευχόμενοι ("praying"), which modifies the principal verb, indicating the means and manner by which the

²³ Also, the emphatic reference to Παῦλος in 1.23 echoes the first word of the letter in 1.1. Also note the use of διάκονος in 1.7 and 23. Cf. Zeilinger, *Erstgeborene*, 44.

²⁴ On the "we" passages see Ollrog, *Mitarbeiter*, 226, n. 112.

²⁵ Which in turn corresponds roughly with Hellenistic epistolary practice: Paul Schubert, *Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgivings* (BZNW 20; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1939) 119, 158-179.

²⁶ That Colossians 1.3-8 signals several motifs to be developed later see O'Brien, *Thanksgivings*, 62-67, 69, 100-104. J.G. van der Watt ("Colossians 1:3-12 Considered as an Exordium," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 57 [1986] 32-42) notes additionally how the prayer reports and the commendation of Epaphras establish goodwill between author and audience in a manner that would be advantageous rhetorically.

²⁷ Schubert, *Thanksgivings*, 10-39, 43-82; O'Brien, *Thanksgivings*, 75-100.

thanksgiving is conveyed. The thought behind this element is completed only with verses 9 ff., where *προσευχόμενοι* is repeated and the intercessory aspect of the prayer-report is clarified by the addition of *καὶ αἰτούμενοι* ("and asking").²⁸ The sixth element commences with the causal participle *ἀκούσαντες* ("because we have heard") in verse 4 (again modifying the principal verb) and extends through the end of verse 8, specifying the grounds for giving thanks. This consists of a relatively lengthy and fully positive depiction of the working of the gospel in Colossae and in the world, and of the connection established in this regard between Paul and the readers by the faithful ministry of Epaphras.²⁹

The seventh element consists of the *ἵνα*-clause of verses 9 ff., which continues the report begun in verse 3 by naming the content of Paul's intercessory prayers for the Colossians.³⁰ This identifies and confirms certain goals that the Colossians as Christians have accepted, as well as the mechanisms for achieving them. The author reports that Paul, in response to the news of the gospel's success in the Lycus River valley, continually asks God in prayer that the recipients be filled with the knowledge of God's will (cf. 1.6). In this context, *ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ καὶ συνέσει πνευματικῇ* (verse 9) may indicate the means by which the prayer request is to be granted.³¹ Colossians 1.10 ff., beginning with the infinitive *περιπατήσαι*, spells out the aim of the petitionary prayer, specifically the goal of the readers' being filled with this knowledge. The apostle's hope is that they will "walk worthily of the Lord" (1.10). Four coordinate participial phrases dependent on the infinitive show what it means in the author's mind to conduct oneself in such a way. A worthy life is characterized by "bearing fruit in every good work," by "growing in the knowledge of God" (1.10), by "being empowered by the might of God's glory" (1.11a), and by "giving thanks with joy to the Father" (1.11b-12, cf. Philippians 1.4).

The last of these four phrases clearly echoes 1.3, where Paul and Timothy had expressed their gratitude in prayer to God for the faith of the Colossians in the gospel, a theme whose description occupied

²⁸ The verb *αἰτεῖν* is rarely employed by Paul (cf. I Corinthians 1.22, also Ephesians 3.13, 20), but is commonly used of petitions to God in the gospels; on asking God for *σοφία* (Colossians 1.9) cf. James 1.5-6.

²⁹ On the structure of vv. 4-8 see Zeilinger, *Erstgeborene*, 34-36; Lohmeyer, *Briefe*, 20.

³⁰ Most commentators underscore the strong connection of 1.9 ff. with what precedes, indicated in part by the repetition of some key terms; see also O'Brien, *Thanksgivings*, 82-83.

³¹ Taking *ἐν* in its instrumental sense, thus "...by having all spiritual wisdom and discernment."

1.3-11. In 1.12 ff., the mood remains essentially the same, though the subject shifts to the thanksgiving to be rendered by the Colossians themselves and the reasons for their indebtedness and gratitude. In effect, then, the readers are to join the apostle in giving thanks to God, to follow his lead and his example in acknowledging the impact of the gospel in the world and for their own lives. In this sense all of 1.13-22 can be understood as an elucidation of and exposition on verse 12: "giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you for a share in the inheritance of the saints in the (realm of) light." Everything that follows shows the nature and the glory of this inheritance and reminds the readers of how this "qualification" has taken place, all of which is the cause of thanksgiving.³² Colossians 1.13-14 elaborates on the transformation effected by God for the recipients, drawing from baptismal concepts that would have been associated with their conversion. These verses also form a transition and introduction to the Christ-hymn of 1.15-20. God has transferred the faithful from the realm of darkness to the kingdom of the beloved Son, in union with whom the readers have the forgiveness of sins. The references to the Son and to forgiveness then become the bridge to the expanded praise of Christ contained in the traditional hymn. In this sense, 1.15-20 functions as a long excursus between verse 14 and 1.21-22, which returns to a description of what God has accomplished specifically for the recipients.

Questions regarding the compositional history and character of this hymn are too numerous and complex to detain us long here. The extensive evidence of symmetry and parallelism in the piece has been frequently noted, though opinions differ as to its interpretation. The hymn appears to contain two stanzas or panels, distinguished by formal markers and point of reference. The first panel, 1.15-18a, celebrates the Son's supremacy and sufficiency in relation to the cosmos by virtue of his unequaled role in creation. The second panel, 1.18b-20, celebrates the Son's supremacy and sufficiency in relation to the new creation, the church redeemed by God through Christ's death and resurrection, which accomplished the reconciliation of all things.³³ The two panels share a number of formal components that help show how their respective contents mirror and mutually reinforce and interpret one another. Both stanzas begin with ὅς ἐστιν plus a noun complement (εἰκών, "image" in verse 15, ἀρχή, "begin-

³² Cf. Sappington, *Revelation*, 197-198.

³³ According to this reading, Colossians 1.18a ("and he is the head of the body, the church") serves as a transitional line, anticipating the subject-matter and time-reference of the second panel.

ning" in verse 18b), which is followed closely with the apposition *πρωτότοκος* ("first-born"). In both panels we also find the phrase *ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ* coupled with a verb and then the subject, the latter encompassing some idea of completeness (*τὰ πάντα*, "all things" in verse 16, *πάν τὸ πλήρωμα*, "all the fullness" in verse 19). And then shortly afterwards come constructions with *δι' αὐτοῦ* and *εἰς αὐτόν*, with all the personal pronouns referring to Christ. Additionally, each stanza contains the phrases "in the heavens" and "upon the earth" (verses 16 and 20) and each has a segment where two or more substantives are linked with *εἴτε...εἴτε...* (verses 16 and 20). The hymn eloquently affirms for the recipients Christ's divinely-ordained status as Lord and savior, the one who is preeminent in the universe. The hymn testifies to the belief that the key figure of world history is Christ, and the key act of salvation history is the Christ-event, which is also the defining moment of the Christian movement, that which determines the reality and the allegiance of the readers' life in Christ.

The final paragraph of the subsection (in 1.3-23) is 1.21-23, which resumes the direct speech of 1.3-14, in effect reiterating the claims of 1.12-14 while carrying these claims further in light of the hymn's christological affirmations, focusing on the theme of reconciliation. In fact, the author's statements regarding the transformation of the readers in 1.21-22 essentially define the concepts of transfer and forgiveness announced in 1.13 and 14, while demonstrating what is most applicable in his interpretation of the hymn to the experience of the readers.³⁴ Correspondingly, the shift to second-person verbs and pronouns in 1.21-23 renders the remarks here more pointed and personal (cf. the use of the first-person plural in 1.13-14, and of the third-person singular in 1.15-20).³⁵ We note, too, that here the moral quality evident in the exposition of Christian transformation becomes more detailed, indicating what the author most wants the recipients to affirm and do in terms of the gospel.

The internal structure of the segment proceeds according to four logical steps. Colossians 1.21 begins by describing the previous state of the addressees. Formerly they were "estranged" from God, enemies of God on account of evil deeds (cf. "the realm of darkness" in verse 13 and "sins" in verse 14). Verse 1.22a then contrasts this state of depravity with the Colossians' present status.³⁶ In the physical

³⁴ Gnlika, *Kolossierbrief*, 88-93.

³⁵ The introductory and emphatic *καὶ ὑμᾶς* in v. 21 marks the return to the language of direct speech.

³⁶ Colossians 1.21-22 makes use of a sharp (and probably traditional) contrast with *ποτέ* and *νυνί* (cf. 2.13, 3.7-8); see Peter Tachau, "*Einst*" und "*Jetzt*" im Neuen Testament: *Beobachtungen zu einem urchristlichen Predigtschema in der neutestamentlichen*

body of Christ and through his death they have been "reconciled" (ἀποκατήλλαξεν) with God. The thought here clearly builds upon the proclamations of the Christ-hymn in verse 20, which also makes mention of the crucifixion and uses a form of the verb ἀποκαταλλάσσειν to depict what the death of Christ has accomplished for the created world (cf. the references to inheritance, the beloved Son, and forgiveness in 1.12-14). Third, 1.22b points to the purpose of this reconciling action – to present (παραστήσαι, cf. μετέστησεν in verse 13) the audience before God as holy,³⁷ without blemish or blame.

The fourth element, in verse 23, submits something new to the letter so far, creating a transition to the next unit, namely, a condition of God's saving activity for the Colossians. While God has restored the cosmos to its proper relation to Godself through Christ, the benefits of this reconciliation are not experienced by individuals automatically, apart from their faith in God through Christ. The readers will continue in their status as those who are presented before God as saints, "provided that you remain established and steadfast in the faith." This conditional clause, which basically represents the first admonition of the letter, involves a call to Christian endurance, bringing to mind the virtues of ὑπομονή and μακροθυμία extolled in verse 11 of the intercessory prayer. This means that the Colossians must not abandon the hope that is held out by the gospel which was proclaimed to them and which they have accepted (cf. 1.4-6).³⁸ The foundation of their new life, then, their grounds for giving thanks to God, is the gospel. The letter-writer reminds the audience that the hope and the power of the gospel cannot be separated from the life of faith of those who have accepted it, who are in Christ's body, the church. Moreover, neither can the hope and the power of the gospel be separated from the one who proclaims and authorizes it for the community. Thus "Paul" reminds the Colossians that the gospel which is transforming them, and in which they must remain steadfast, is also the gospel of which he is a servant. Their affirmation of the gospel and their dedication to continue in obedience to the gospel are closely linked with his own person, proclamation, and ministry.

Briefliteratur und zu seiner Vorgeschichte (FRLANT 105; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972) esp. 9-11, 80-81, 84-89, 100-103, 107, 123-125; Lona, *Eschatologie*, 86-100.

³⁷ ἁγίους, cf. ἁγίων in v. 12.

³⁸ Ernst R. Wendland ("Cohesion in Colossians: A Structural-Thematic Outline," *Notes on Translation* 6 [1992] 39) suggests that the triad of qualifiers in 1.22 (holy, blameless, faultless) may in some sense parallel the triad in v. 23 (established, steadfast, not shifting).

Colossians 1.24-2.5 – This leads to an extended presentation that deals with the apostolate of Paul, both in terms of its fundamental rendering and in terms of the bearing that Paul's service has on the Colossian community. As in the previous subsection, the substance and purpose of the unit are affirming in nature. So, for instance, the good standing of the readers with respect to the gospel continues to be acknowledged: they are "the hope of glory" and Christ is ἐν ὑμῖν (1.27); the "good order" and "stability" of their faith is a source of rejoicing for the apostle (2.5). Similarly, the positive features of the gospel itself also continue to be endorsed: the gospel is "the word of God, the mystery hidden for ages and generations" (1.25-26); those to whom God has revealed this mystery know the wealth of divine glory (1.27); the mystery is nothing other than Christ himself (2.2), in whom are hidden all the treasures of divine wisdom (2.3).

The bulk of the material here, though, centers on assurances regarding the authority of the author, Paul, to proclaim the gospel, and of the relevance of his work and witness for the readers. This focus echoes and expands upon warranting statements in 1.3-23, especially 1.3-4 and 9, where the readers had learned of Paul's prayerful thanksgiving at the news of their reception of the gospel, and 1.7-8, which confirms the positive relationship of Paul to Epaphras, from whom they originally received the gospel. This continuity in function and theme from 1.3-23 to 1.24-2.5 is buttressed by the repetition of a number of leading terms and ideas. Thus Christ's body is the church (1.24, cf. 1.18), of which Paul became a minister (1.24b-25a, cf. 1.23b); Paul's work on behalf of the gospel is carried out in accordance with God's will (1.27 with ἡθέλησεν, cf. 1.1), and this gospel reveals divine δόξα (1.27, cf. 1.11) and is the source of hope (1.27, cf. 1.5, 23) for the saints (1.26, cf. 1.2, 4, 12, 22). In line with this, the goal of the gospel's declaration (1.28, cf. 1.23) is the dissemination of divine knowledge (1.27-28, 2.2-3, cf. 1.9-10) on a global scale (1.28, 2.1, cf. 1.6, 23) in order to present people as blameless in Christ before God (1.28, cf. 1.22) as they maintain their faith in good order (2.5, cf. 1.23). This section, then, does not so much introduce a new set of themes or a new perspective on those themes, but extends the foregoing affirmations by vividly demonstrating how the gospel that the Colossians affirm in word and deed is and should be none other than the apostolic gospel, the Pauline gospel, which continues to be proclaimed in the epistle itself.³⁹ The directives of the apostle, then,

³⁹ On the continuity of 1.24 ff. with what precedes see esp. Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 126-127 (who understands the material in 1.13-2.3 to be united by the author's focus on "doctrinal" issues); Gnllka, *Kolossenerbrief*, 4-5, 39, 93-106 (who labels all of

are directly relevant to the Christian existence of the community, both past and present. Paul specifies what sort of gospel the readers are to affirm in terms of its theological character, source of wisdom, moral bearing, and means of transmission and verification.

The assertions of 1.24 ff. demonstrate Paul's authority and relevance in a number of ways, though the following items may be emphasized. The guiding theme, apparently, has to do with the apostolic *ἀγών*. Empowered by divine presence (1.29, cf. 2.12), Paul takes on the struggles appropriate to his office on behalf of the church. The nature of this conflict and labor is indicated at several points in the text. Paul's apostolic striving entails for him first of all personal suffering, pains that help to fill up what is still lacking in regard to "the afflictions of Christ" (1.24).⁴⁰ Paul's sufferings are presumably a result of and concurrent with his efforts to proclaim the gospel to the entire world, instructing and warning "all people" in order to lead as many as possible to truth, wisdom, and maturity in Christ (1.28). The basis of this undertaking lies in the divine commission given to Paul so that he might reveal to God's saints the holy mystery, the primeval secret that the wealth of God's glory is now at work among those who are in Christ (1.25-27).

Such statements are suggestive of the extraordinary power that informs Paul's person and mission. He is spiritually present as mystagogue, apostle, and minister of God even for those who do not know him in the flesh, the readers in particular. This aspect of Paul's office, which displays something of its special authority, is underscored repeatedly throughout the passage, particularly in 2.1-5. Paul's sufferings are *ὕπὲρ ὑμῶν* (1.24, 2.1); the mystery that he divulges concerns Christ *ἐν ὑμῖν* (1.27). He struggles greatly for all those who have not seen him face-to-face, most notably on behalf of the Christians in Colossae and Laodicea (2.1, cf. 4.15-16). He is with the addressees both in the spirit and by means of the epistle, observing and responding to their conduct as faithful Christians in a manner that accords with his divine stewardship (2.5).

In this regard the formulations of 2.1 ("For I want you to know...") and 2.4 ("I am telling you this so that...") are meaningful. The nature of Paul's commission enables him, and indeed requires him to struggle for and instruct Christians everywhere, including those of the Lycus River valley. By means of these two "disclosure" statements he indicates in an express and rather formal manner the

1.9-29: "Grundlegung: Das apostolische und universale Evangelium"); Zeilinger, *Erstgeborene*, 34-39 (he entitles 1.1-2.5, "Die 'Position'").

⁴⁰ Cf. above, pp. 74-77.

purpose behind his efforts on behalf of the Colossians and in particular behind the writing of the letter. He does so in order to "strengthen"⁴¹ their "hearts," to encourage their commitment to the gospel and to nurture their life in Christ, deterring them from any deception that might undermine the steadfastness of their faith (cf. Hebrews 13.9). Arguing that the focus of the letter-writer's statements regarding Paul's mission changes starting at 2.1, many commentators have divided the paragraph of 1.24 ff. into two sections, 1.24-29 and 2.1-5. This shift, however, from a discussion of Paul's apostolic service in general terms to direct address and application to the addressee's situation, hardly indicates a disruption in the overall thought.⁴² Indeed, the whole point of the passage materializes in the attempt to show how Paul's global mission relates to the life of the community at this particular juncture in its history. By and large, the disclosure formulae found in ancient literature are utilized to present information of special and specific pertinence to the reader, often as a way of expounding on preceding remarks.⁴³ In Colossians 2.1 and 4, as elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, the statements introduced by the disclosure formulae draw from the foregoing discussion, relating to the recipients' epistolary situation personally and expressly, and anticipating the heart of the letter's direct appeal to them, which follows starting in 2.6 ff.

As for the literary composition of 1.24-2.5, several scholars have proposed a concentric construction of some kind, either for the passage in its entirety or for some significant portion of it.⁴⁴ Matching references in 1.24 and 2.5 – especially to the apostle's rejoicing (χαίρω/χαίρων), as well as to his σάρξ and to Christ – indicate the application of inclusio to demarcate the section.⁴⁵ Additionally, and supported by this feature, a simple ring composition can be detected. At the extremities of the unit, both 1.24 and 2.4-5 emphasize Paul's rejoicing as he responds to the challenge of his office, doing so on behalf of the readers. Moving closer to the center of the passage, both 1.25-28 and 2.2-3 discuss Paul's revelation of God's mystery,

⁴¹ Cf. *TDNT* 5.773-799.

⁴² Cf. Barth, *Colossians*, 252-253, 270; Aletti, *Colossiens*, 130-131.

⁴³ T.Y. Mullins, "Disclosure: A Literary Form in the New Testament," *NovT* 7 (1964) 44-50; cf. John L. White, "The Introductory Formulae in the Body of the Pauline Letter," *JBL* 90 (1971) 91-97; Cannon, *Traditional Materials*, 150-153; in the Pauline corpus cf. Romans 1.13, 11.25, II Corinthians 1.8, Galatians 1.11, Philippians 1.12, I Thessalonians 2.1, 4.13.

⁴⁴ Paul Lamarche, "Structure de l'Épître aux Colossiens," *Biblica* 56 (1975) 456-460; Zeilinger, *Erstgeborene*, 44-46; Wendland, "Cohesion," 40-41; Aletti, *Colossiens*, 130-131.

⁴⁵ Both verses also contain references to the recipients, ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, σὺν ὑμῖν, etc.

which makes available for those in Christ divine riches (πλοῦτος in 1.27 and 2.2, cf. 2.3) and wisdom (σοφία in 1.28 and 2.3, cf. 2.2). We also note here the verbal correspondence of γινώσκειν (1.27) with ἐπίγνωσις (2.2) and γνῶσις (2.3), and of ἀποκεκρυμμένον (1.26) with ἀπόκρυφοι (2.3).⁴⁶ The center section (1.29-2.1), finally, concentrates on the apostolic struggle, the divine power that supports Paul's efforts, and the inclusion of the readers among the beneficiaries of this striving.

Colossians 2.6-7 – These verses constitute both the conclusion to section I of the letter-body and the transition to section II (2.8-23). Contrary to the interpretation of most commentators, it seems better to take these verses as a summary of what precedes than as an introduction to what follows.⁴⁷ This much is suggested by a number of observations. To begin with, the tone and outlook of the sentence are fully positive, according with the language of affirmation in 1.3-2.5 more obviously than with the warnings and critical exposition of 2.8-23. In this regard the rhetorical coherence with 2.5 is noteworthy. Colossians 2.6-7 essentially restates the basic thrust and intent of the immediately preceding sentence, only recasting that statement of approval regarding the readers' faith into a command or request for them to continue to be faithful (with faith representing a key theme for section I, cf. 1.2, 4, 7, 23, 2.5).

The recurrence of terms and ideas from 1.3 ff. in 2.6-7 is also instructive for explaining the place of these two verses in the epistle. As we have seen, the concept of having "received" (παρελάβετε) Christ in 2.6 points to the whole process of the transmission of Christian traditions, a topic that had dominated much of the discussion in section I, both in terms of indicating the content of those traditions (for example, 1.15-20) and the authoritative means of their conveyance (for example, 1.7-8, 24 ff.). The reception of this tradition is associated with the initial instruction that the readers received as neophytes and the habit of moral compliance appropriate to that instruction. According to 2.7, they are to grow strong in the faith καθὼς ἐδιδάχθητε ("as you were taught"), a reference no doubt intended to evoke the teaching of Epaphras, summarized in 1.5-8. Additionally, the command in 2.6 to "walk" in the Lord echoes 1.10, where Paul had petitioned God so that the Colossians might "walk" worthily of the Lord. Furthermore, in both 1.10-12 and 2.6-7, four participles follow the verb "to walk," explicating its meaning for Christian con-

⁴⁶ Also, if συμβιβασθέντες in 2.2 means "instructed" (see above, p. 41, n. 114) it would match up with διδάσκοντες in 1.28.

⁴⁷ Though cf. Bruce, *Colossians*, 92-94; Lähnemann, *Kolossierbrief*, 49.

duct. In 2.7, each of the first three participles (well-rooted, built-up, established) also makes use of agricultural or architectural imagery found earlier in the letter (see 1.6, 10, 23, 2.5), where the metaphors had also been applied to describe the firm foundation and growth of the Colossian community.⁴⁸ The fourth participial phrase, “abounding in thanksgiving,” brings to mind the language of being filled in 1.9 (cf. 1.24, 2.2) and of giving thanks to the Father in 1.3 and 12. Finally, the parameters of the entire section in 1.3-2.7 are demarcated by means of inclusio. Appropriately enough, the first word of 1.3 is εὐχαριστοῦμεν while the last word of 2.7 is εὐχαριστία. In addition, 1.3 includes the confessional formula “the Lord... Jesus Christ” as does 2.6, though with the terms in reversed order, “Christ Jesus the Lord.”⁴⁹ This credal confession in effect summarizes the gospel of Colossians in its positive, affirming sense, gathering up all that the letter-writer wants to convey to the readers about Christ in 1.3-2.7.⁵⁰ In this light, it is evident that Paul’s prayers for the Colossians to conduct themselves in the Lord, his affirmation of their good standing in the Lord, and, finally, his exhortation for them to continue and do more in the Lord are manners of interacting with the reader utilized in section I which are all cut from the same cloth, exhibiting the same general purpose and orientation.⁵¹ At the same time, the use of an imperative here (περιπατεῖτε), the text’s first, sets the stage for the more direct warnings and appeals that will impel the remainder of the letter.

Section II: Colossians 2.8-23 – It is only with 2.8 ff. that the tone and intent of the author’s remarks to the audience change significantly, indicating the beginning of a new literary section. Here Paul seeks to discredit the teachings of the philosophy. While earlier comments (1.23, 2.4) may have anticipated this discussion, it is only here that a developed critique takes place, one where the offenses of the opposition come clearly into view. The approach throughout involves warning and educating the readers as to the threat that the errorists represent to authentic Christian existence such as it has been affirmed up to this point in the epistle. Structurally, the backbone of the section is located in its three primary admonitions, 2.8,

⁴⁸ If βεβαιούμενοι invokes legal imagery (see *TDNT* 1.600-603) then we could compare instead the earlier language of 1.22.

⁴⁹ These are the only occasions in the epistle where the complete or expanded formula is quoted.

⁵⁰ Gnllka, *Kolossierbrief*, 116; *TDNT* 3.1090.

⁵¹ Thus the οὖν of 2.6 grounds the commands that follow in the faith that the Colossians have already demonstrated in Christ as their Lord; cf. Barth, *Colossians*, 302.

16, and 18. Each is constructed somewhat similarly (βλέπετε μή τις ὑμᾶς...; μὴ οὖν τις ὑμᾶς κρινέτω...; μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς καταβραβεύετω...) and each is buttressed by ensuing explanatory statements (2.9-15, 17, and 19, respectively).⁵² Verses 20-23 then serve as a conclusion and summary to the whole section, with the first words of the paragraph ("If you died with Christ...") creating anticipation for the (similarly constructed) opening of the next section in 3.1 ("So if you were raised with Christ..."; cf. 2.11-13).

The first of the three primary admonitions (2.8) functions as a thesis statement for the section, establishing its mood and announcing its major themes, which appear to be two in number. On one hand, in 2.8 Paul warns the Colossians that the errorists mislead the community by promoting a philosophy that is "according to the elements of the world" (κατὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου) and therefore is not "according to Christ" (κατὰ Χριστόν). What it means to the letter-writer for one in fact to live κατὰ Χριστόν, to be in Christ, to share in his hegemony over every force and entity in the cosmos as set forth earlier in the text, is the subject of 2.9-15. Here, the author concentrates on theological principles that in his mind counter the tenets of the philosophy. The lion's share of the discussion, consequently, is developed in accordance with earlier theological affirmations. For example, verses 9-10, 12, and 14-15 all recall in different ways the hymnic assurances of 1.18-20, while the thought behind 2.13 seems to be predicated upon soteriological reminders such as 1.14, 21-22.⁵³ The central argument of 2.9-15 revolves around the claim that through baptism the readers are "in Christ," with the key phrase ἐν αὐτῷ in verses 9 and 15 forming an inclusio for the subsection. In Christ the Colossians have been filled and in him they have put off the fleshly body, having been forgiven all their sins (2.10-11, 13). Thus they participate in the benefits of Christ's victory over the principalities and powers.⁵⁴ Any moral code or any form of religion oriented towards such *stoicheia* can only be a sham, a distortion of God's intention for human fulfillment.

On the other hand, in 2.8 the letter-writer also cautions the recipients as to the merely "human" traditions and standards that form the basis of the rival movement. In this light, their religious activities are nothing more than a futile deception. The refutation of the actual teachings associated with these traditions and the vanity they

⁵² "See to it that no one...you" (2.8); "So, do not allow anyone to pass judgment on you" (2.16); "Do not allow anyone to disqualify you" (2.18).

⁵³ Cf. Lamarche, "Structure," 459.

⁵⁴ With ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας in 2.10 forming something of an inclusio with τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας in 2.15.

breed are then the subject of 2.16-19. This section presents two parallel admonitions, both of which instruct the members of the audience not to allow their worship or conduct to be judged according to oppositional standards. The Colossians now belong to a heavenly reality, having escaped the realm of darkness that governed their previous existence (cf. 1.12-14, 21-22, 2.13). They must now continue to reject the earthly priorities of the created order which can blind them to their true nature and commitments. Some specific aspects of the aberrant human traditions are apparently cited in 2.16 and 18 – dietary regulations, calendrical observances, heavenly visions, and so forth. In the supporting material placed in 2.17 and 19, the author denounces these practical aberrations with reference to the *σῶμα* of Christ, which operates as the final criterion for the evaluation of religious practices and the motivations that inform them (cf. 2.9, 23). The preoccupations of the philosophy, says Paul, represent nothing but the shadow, the insubstantial illusion of God's will for human existence, while the reality, the *σῶμα*, belongs to Christ. Similarly, the conceited and judgmental attitude of the false teachers, grounded in their esoteric wisdom and visions of angel-worship, proves that they do not belong to the *σῶμα* of Christ, which is the source of unity and growth guided by God (cf. 2.2, 3.11).

Colossians 2.20-23 concludes the section of correction in 2.8-23 by drawing together a number of salient concepts from the preceding material in the form of a pointed summary.⁵⁵ The author reminds the readers that they have died with Christ from the dominion of the *stoicheia* (cf. 2.11-13, 15) and so are free from the *δόγματα* associated with their veneration (cf. 2.14, 16). These regulations are destined to pass away (cf. 2.17), based as they are upon teachings that are merely human in origin and nature (cf. 2.8). The opposition may claim the reputation of wisdom (*λόγον...σοφίας*, cf. *φιλοσοφίας* in 2.8)⁵⁶ on account of its "self-chosen worship" (*ἐθελοθρησκία*, cf. *θέλων...θρησκεία* in 2.18), its "humility" (*ταπεινοφροσύνη*, cf. 2.18), and its "severity to the body" (cf. *σῶμα* in 2.9, 17, 19). However, the author's scrutiny has revealed the sort of life promoted by the philosophy to be in fact "of no value whatsoever" (*οὐκ ἐν τιμῇ τινι*, cf. *κενῆς ἀπάτης* in 2.8 and *εἰκῇ* in 2.18). Given their purely earthly and human orientation, the practices of the errorists lead only to "the gratification of the flesh" (*πλησμονὴν τῆς σαρκός*, cf. *πλήρωμα* in 2.9, *πεπληρωμένοι* in 2.10, *σαρκός* in 2.13, 18).

⁵⁵ Wendland, "Cohesion," 43-44; cf. Zeilinger, *Erstgeborene*, 60. The section in fact introduces very little by way of new ideas or counter-arguments.

⁵⁶ This forms something of an *inclusio* for section II.

Section III: Colossians 3.1-4.6 – The third and final major section of the letter-body is 3.1-4.6. Here the author furnishes the reader with practical instruction in an exhortatory mode as to the kind of moral aspirations that suit the theological affirmations conveyed in 1.3-2.7 and demonstrate a clean break with the practices berated in 2.8-23. Already the author has indicated that authentic commitment to Christ entails a definite manner of conduct that is “worthy of the Lord,” indicating also the social context and eschatological perspective of such conduct (for example, 1.4, 10-11, 14, 21-23, 28, 2.2, 6-7). The emphasis in 2.19 on unity and common growth in the body whose head is Christ, in contrast to the judgmental and disruptive activities of the opposition, anticipated the major theme of the exhortatory section.

The author’s instructions for the Colossians as to the practical dimensions of Christian morality are organized into three units. 3.1-4 serves as an introduction that also links the section with specific themes of the foregoing argument.⁵⁷ 3.5-4.1 then imparts the instructions themselves, arranged in two long paragraphs, each of which contains further subdivisions: 3.5-11 develops the negative ramifications of the thesis in 3.1-4, while 3.12-4.1 explores its positive connotations. Finally, 4.1-6 functions as a paraenetic conclusion, both for section III in particular and for the whole letter-body in general.⁵⁸ The hortatory character of the entire section is evident above all in the employment of imperatives and precepts, and in the reference to moral virtues, duties, and roles.⁵⁹

The introduction in 3.1-4 establishes the instructional tone as well as the essential parameters and objectives of the ensuing paraenetic material. Structurally, at the heart of the unit we find the two present imperatives, τὰ ἄνω ζητεῖτε (“seek that which is above”) and τὰ ἄνω φρονεῖτε (“set your minds on what is above”); these are suggestive in meaning of the breadth and nature of the moral implications to be circumscribed by the author, one command relating more obviously to visible conduct, the other more to one’s intellectual and emotional orientation.⁶⁰ In depicting this conduct and this orientation, he builds upon the fundamental distinction, presupposed repeatedly throughout the text, between the heavenly realm above,

⁵⁷ On 3.1-4 as transitional, continuing the train of thought and imagery, see Lähnemann, *Kolossenerbrief*, 30-31. On its possible function as a *peroratio*, see Wolter, *Brief*, 164-165.

⁵⁸ Cf. Aletti, *Colossians*, 215-216.

⁵⁹ See above, pp. 40-47.

⁶⁰ Cf. Gnlika, *Kolossenerbrief*, 173. On the structure of the unit see Harris, *Colossians*, 136; Zeilinger, *Erstgeborene*, 61-62.

where God and Christ are, and the earthly realm, polluted by human and fleshly standards. In this form, the antithesis emerges most pointedly in its moral dimension. Since the readers, in baptism, have died and have been raised with Christ, their bearing is heavenly insofar as Christ is their life. The antithesis also takes on temporal dimensions. Paul tells the Colossians that their life in Christ is for the present time hidden, though it will be revealed with Christ at the eschatological judgment in glory.⁶¹ Thus if the recipients are to meet the author's moral challenge, their conduct must manifest in this world the heavenly and eschatological lordship of Christ. Conversely, the Colossians have died to their previous mode of existence and they must no longer set their minds in accordance with the priorities of the created world. This overriding corollary between τὰ ἄνω φρονεῖτε and μὴ (φρονεῖτε) τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς governs the organization of material in 3.5-4.1, with 3.5-11 corresponding thematically to the latter, and 3.12-4.1 corresponding to the former.

Colossians 3.5-4.1 – The opening of 3.5-11, then, reiterates the basic ideas of dying to the old life and of rejecting the standards of the “earthly” manner of moral existence: “So put to death the members that are on the earth” (3.5a), referring to the members of one's body as they are used for immoral purposes, such as those specified in verses 5b and 8. The paragraph based upon this command appears to be divided into two subsections, 3.5-7 and 8-11. Each unit incorporates a list of five vices to be shunned and each is delineated by means of inclusio.⁶² As for content, both units condemn behavior that might cause discord in the Christian community. The particular vices named appear to be indicative of those who would deify what belongs to earthly existence (like the opponents of 2.8-23) and whose attitudes disrupt healthy relationships within the body of Christ.

The first of these lists clusters vices associated by the author with the audience's past, pagan course in life (immorality, uncleanness, passion, evil desire),⁶³ all of which relate in same fashion to πλεονεξία (“overreaching”), which is clearly emphasized.⁶⁴ The list as a whole, then, outlines a negative pattern of conduct degraded particularly by

⁶¹ Cf. Edouard Delebecque, “Sur un Problème de Temps chez Saint Paul,” *Biblica* 70 (1989) 389-395.

⁶² In the first unit it is antithetical inclusio: νεκρώσατε in v. 5 and ἐζήτε in v. 7. In the second unit we have τὰ πάντα in 3.8 and 11.

⁶³ πορνεία and ἀκαθαρσία are sometimes used in connection with the condemnation of idolatry, and so link up with what follows. The apparent undertones of sexual misconduct may find their positive counterpart in 3.18-19, the prescription of moral duties “in the Lord.”

⁶⁴ Barth, *Colossians*, 404; Countryman, *Dirt*, 108-109, 217-218.

greed, avarice, covetousness, and hybris, which both violate other people and offend God (3.5c-6), corrupting moral vision and spiritual development. The "old person," ridden with these vices, does not desire to do God's will, but desires what rightly belongs to others, evidencing a preoccupation with the things of the world. As in 3.4, the writer's presentation of Christian life takes into account eschatological judgment, the expectation of which conditions and motivates conduct appropriate to the converted life. Those who disobey God and refuse God's will by continuing in the squalor of immorality can expect only God's wrath in the age to come.

The second subsection, beginning with the transitional *vv̄i dé* in verse 8 (cf. 1.21-22), is structured according to the baptismal motifs of stripping off the old human self with its moral faults and putting on the new self, which is being redeemed in Christ in accordance with the new creation. In this new creation the boundaries that have customarily separated groups of people are overcome, since Christ is "in all" (3.11, cf. 2.10). These divisions refer to such human characteristics as ethnic origin or social position (cf. 3.22-4.1), the basis of which is dissolved by Christ and (more to the point in this section) by the moral conduct of those in Christ.⁶⁵ The list of vices denounced at this juncture – wrath (cf. 3.6), rage, malice, slander, obscene language – accents degrading and violent emotions that often result from or lead to evil speech, words that can easily injure and alienate others in the church. The concern with speech continues into verse 9a, with the precept imploring the readers not to lie to one another.⁶⁶ Instead, they are to clothe themselves with the new human being, which grows in and is intended for knowledge of the creator's will, the ultimate standard of truth (cf. *φρονεῖτε* in 3.2).

The description of the readers as putting on the new human being in 3.10 anticipates the command that initiates the next unit, 3.12 ff.: *ἐνδύσασθε*. Just as they are to put to death and put off the vices of their former lives, so too the recipients must put on virtues that befit their new life in Christ, with its heavenly orientation. This section, predominately positive in the bearing of its counsel, manifests a more extensive and complex structure than the preceding unit, in keeping with the author's predilection for endorsing bona fide Christian standards. In terms of its literary composition, the unit appears to be organized according to three categories of moral instruction that mutu-

⁶⁵ In this way 3.11 anticipates the thrust of the next unit, 3.12-15b.

⁶⁶ Pokorny (*Colossians*, 168) and Barth (*Colossians*, 408) suggest that 3.9a is a summary of the preceding vices. The thought contrasts with the emphasis on the *ἀλήθεια* of the gospel made earlier in the letter, 1.5-6.

ally support and complement one another. The first unit, 3.12-15b, exhorts the Colossians to conduct that edifies their community and the personal relationships on which it depends. The second, 3.15c-17, counsels them as to the proper response of the community to God. And the third, 3.18-4.1, offers precepts as to how the members of the community are to comport themselves with respect to the moral expectations of institutions that belong to the broader world outside the church. The literary boundaries of each unit are marked with either *inclusio* or *exclusio*.⁶⁷ When evaluated according to this structure, we can see how the author's recommendations, selective as they are, encompass the whole range of moral "living" and moral "life" suggested by the wording of 3.3-4, assuming a broad scope of reference and application for Christian existence.

Colossians 3.12-15b contains advice that focuses on the moral conduct of the recipients in terms of their future as a community. Here the letter-writer advocates virtues (again in a listing of five, contrasting with the rosters of verses 5 and 8) that underscore the altruism and genuine concern and respect for others that is to mark mutual relations within the church: a compassionate heart, kindness, humility, gentleness, forbearance. The new life, according to the author's interpretation, is decidedly a social reality, where the forces that typically alienate people from one another must be defeated by each Christian in terms of everything he or she says, does, or feels. In this regard the audience is bid by Paul to assume attitudes and behavior that reflect the mercy of God and the self-sacrifice of Christ. He summarizes the appeal to realize this new life by reminding the recipients of their exalted status; they are to put on Christian virtues as the "elect of God, holy, and beloved" (3.12, cf. Deuteronomy 7.6-8). In fact, it appears that moral appeals relating to each of these three attributes – *ἐκλεκτοί*, *ἅγιοι*, and *ἡγαπημένοι* – determine the contents of the unit, particularly in verses 13-15b. So, insofar as the members of the community have been forgiven their sins by the Lord and they in turn forgive one another whenever a complaint arises (verse 13), they show themselves to be holy and sanctified (cf. 1.12-14, 21-22, which also connect God's forgiveness of the believers' sins with their new status as *ἅγιοι*). 3.14 then summons the Colossians to make *ἀγάπη* their "bond of perfection" in all matters, a goal appropriate to those whose Lord is God's "beloved

⁶⁷ For 3.12-15b: *ἐκλεκτοί* in 3.12 and *ἐκλήθητε* in 3.15b (cf. *σπλάγχνα* in 3.12 and *καρδίαις* in 3.15a). For 3.15c-17: *εὐχάριστοι* in 3.15c and *εὐχαριστοῦντες* in 3.17. For 3.18-4.1: *εὐχαριστοῦντες* in 3.17 and *εὐχαριστία* in 4.2. On the *exclusio* see Wendland, "Cohesion," 48.

Son" (1.13) and who are themselves beloved of God.⁶⁸ And 3.15 reminds the readers that they have been called (ἐκλήθητε) by God into one body, whose head is Christ. Thus the peace that Christ has accomplished for the world ought to rule in their hearts (cf. 1.20). The sort of peace that the author has in mind here is to govern not only human relations but also the relationship between the members of the church and God, a topic that transitions to the next unit, 3.15c-17.

Appropriately, Paul includes in his outline of a Christian disposition that actively seeks τὰ ἄνω encouragement for the community to make the giving of thanks to God through Christ the hallmark of that existence. Thanksgiving for the author, given the nature of this subsection, does not refer mainly to a private, individual affair or to a grateful disposition, but to the public life of the community, where it is to operate as an integral and defining component of its identity. The author seizes upon this opportunity for instruction to drive home a theme that had been struck earlier in the epistle (1.3, 12, 2.7, also 4.2).⁶⁹ The recommendations conveyed at this point in chapter three make use of a number of different terms for Christian praise, adding internal cohesion to the unit. The Colossian congregations are told first, in verse 15c, simply to "be thankful," a command that serves as the unit's thesis statement.⁷⁰ Paul spells out what this entails in verses 16-17. The community is to allow the word of Christ, the gospel (cf. 1.5-6, 25, 4.3), to "dwell richly" among its members.⁷¹ The word is at work in the congregation in the form of mutual teaching and admonition guided by divine wisdom.⁷² It is also present when singing spirit-inspired psalms, hymns, and odes to God with gratitude and from one's heart. The author concludes the unit by extending the central theme in such a way that the advice foreshadows the extensive referential scope of the ensuing paragraph (3.18-4.1). Whatever the readers may do (cf. 3.23), in speaking or in action, they are to do everything "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (3.17). In this way, through Christ they are giving thanks to the Father (cf. 1.3). The lordship of Christ, first acknowledged at baptism, determines all of Christian existence, including the proper relationship of those in Christ with God. The praise of God, then, is to

⁶⁸ Cf. I Thessalonians 1.4, II Thessalonians 2.13.

⁶⁹ Cf. O'Brien, *Thanksgivings*, 62-67.

⁷⁰ εὐχάριστοι may be intended to link up with the list of attributes that opens v. 12, which are also nominative masculine plural.

⁷¹ For ἐνοικεῖν cf. 1.19, 2.9; on πλουσίως cf. 1.27, 2.2-3.

⁷² This request, a reformulation of 1.28, indicates in one sense how the activities of the apostolic office are to be paradigmatic for the exercise of community life.

be a matter of Christian life and of the mutual upbuilding of Christian brothers and sisters. This underscores communal life as "the locus of moral formation."⁷³

The third and final paragraph consists of the *Haustafel*, with much of its structure and content familiar from contemporaneous codes of moral duties considered necessary for the Hellenistic household. Here the author illustrates prescriptively how everything that the Colossians do and say ought to be carried out in the name of the Lord. In this way the lordship of Christ in the world and in the lives of the faithful manifests itself in those daily relationships and social institutions that constitute the fabric of human society. The composition and logic of the passage are especially clear. The advice is arranged according to the six different groups of persons addressed, which form three pairs of reciprocal relationships (wives-husbands in 3.18-19, children-parents in 3.20-21, slaves-masters in 3.22-4.1). Within each pairing, the author's command is directed first at the socially weaker party. Each of the six units consists of a vocative address followed by an imperatival verb whose entreaty is then justified by some explanation, usually with reference to the Lord. The exhortation to slaves is considerably more detailed than that intended for the other five groups.

Generally speaking, we can see that the injunctions of the *Haustafel* extend and apply the meaning of the virtues enjoined earlier in the chapter. All people in the congregation, regardless of their position in society, are to be guided in their relationships by a humble, forgiving, and loving attitude and out of gratitude to God. In this context it should be emphasized that the household represents the most common and elementary structure of Hellenistic society. All moral obligations, even those recognized within "secular" institutions, are subordinate to the will of God and are carried out as part of the new creation, much the same way as the moral objectives detailed in 3.12-17. In this sense there are for the Christian no "secular" institutions at all, even if they are not identical with the church itself. As with the material that precedes the household code, the underlying concern appears in the expectation of respect for and unity with other people. In this case, though, the theme is not so much solidarity within the church – neither the household itself nor the specific members of the household mentioned as referents are necessarily Christian – as the imperative of living in harmony with all people, in accordance with prevailing expectations and as part of one's service to the Lord, who has brought peace to the whole world.

⁷³ Meeks, "To Walk Worthily," 49.

Colossians 4.2-6 – This portion of the text, continuing as it does with imperatives and moral advice, can be taken as the conclusion to section III of the epistle. At the same time, these verses also conclude the entire letter-body and function as something of a gnomic reprise, recapitulating a number of its key themes, presenting them in roughly the same order that they originally appeared.⁷⁴ The passage consists of three units, 4.2, 3-4, and 5-6. The first of these (“persevere in prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving”) recollects the prayerful thanksgiving that opened the letter in 1.3 ff., as well as the appeals throughout for the Colossians themselves to be thankful (1.12, 2.7, 3.15-17). The second unit, 4.3-4, then asks the audience to pray also for Paul and his associates in order that they might reveal “the mystery of Christ” and proclaim the word, the gospel, on account of which Paul is enchained. The formulation of this request draws upon a number of terms and ideas that were central to the apostolic self-commendation in 1.24 ff.⁷⁵

After summarizing Paul’s commission, the section draws to a close in 4.5-6 by summarizing the Colossians’ commission, underscoring the common service that the audience shares with the apostle to manifest in the world its calling and its obedience to God. This piece consists of two petitions. First, Paul admonishes the readers to “walk in wisdom towards the outsiders, making the most of the time.” Then in verse 6 they are urged to “let your word always be determined by grace, seasoned with salt, so that you will know how to answer everyone.” The implication here, that the readers are to have an active interest in evangelism and the proclamation of the word, anticipates the personal news and communications of the next section, 4.7 ff., which continues to emphasize the shared interests that bond the apostolic mission with the Colossian church.⁷⁶ More importantly, the appeal for the recipients to conduct themselves in accordance with the wisdom (of God) effectively sums up the intent of the letter’s correctional and exhortatory sections, where the author combated the false wisdom of the opponents and prescribed a way of life predicated upon knowledge of God’s will. The reference to “the outsiders” and to “everyone” might conceivably include not only the non-Christian world in general, but could (in light of the message that the audience has just heard) bring to mind also earlier refer-

⁷⁴ Cf. Cannon, *Traditional Materials*, 160; Aletti, *Colossiens*, 257.

⁷⁵ For “the mystery of Christ” cf. 1.26, 2.2; for the “word” cf. 1.25; for λαλῆσαι cf. 1.28, 2.4; for φανεροῦν cf. 1.26; on God’s opening the door for the gospel cf. 1.26-27; on Paul’s chains cf. 1.24, 1.29-2.1; for the use of the first-person plural cf. 1.28.

⁷⁶ Also the focus on speech throughout 4.2-6 seems to anticipate the communications of 4.7 ff.

ences to the opposition (2.8 ff.), to those who have yet to take off the old human being (3.5 ff.), and to the non-Christian referents of the *Haustafel* (3.18 ff.).

The prominence of verbal discourse as a topic in 4.6 also connects in a basic way with previous teachings in the letter.⁷⁷ The gospel itself, for instance, is consistently presented as the "word," something that is spoken, heard, proclaimed, sung, and taught. The purpose of Christian ministry is to be located especially in the act of proclaiming, teaching, and warning in accordance with the gospel. Conversely, the errorists are condemned on account of their attempts to defraud and mislead the congregation through specious argument (πιθανολογία), and 3.8-9 demonstrates that sins of the tongue are among the chief enemies of the new human self. Instead, the λόγος of Christ is to dwell among the community in diverse and uplifting ways, and whatever one does should be done in the name of the Lord (3.16-17).

Finally, while the precise meaning of "seasoned with salt" is unclear, comparison with Exodus 30.35 suggests that we have here a traditional allusion to the purity which is to accompany thanksgiving to God, a concept that would resonate not only with earlier references to thanksgiving in the epistle but connect especially with εὐχαριστοῦμεν in 1.3, forming an inclusio for the entire letter-body.

Colossians 4.7-18 – The epistolary postscript, in comparison with that of other early Christian letters, is relatively long and involved, which is somewhat unexpected in light of the compactness evident in the letter-body's construction.⁷⁸ The nature of the postscript's contents, consisting of personal communications and instructions, corresponds generally with the conventions that governed Hellenistic letter-writing, even while demonstrating some particularly Pauline features.⁷⁹ As with the epistolary prescript (1.1-2), the material of the section correlates with and elaborates some of the important themes introduced in the body of the work. It should be noted in particular that the language of the postscript continues in the exhortatory mode of 3.1-4.6, especially in its application of imperatives at 4.10, 15, 16, 17, and 18.⁸⁰ In connection with this, the employment of

⁷⁷ Cf. 4.2-4, with references to praying, giving thanks, speaking, revealing.

⁷⁸ On the composition of the section see Zeilinger, "Träger," 175-192; cf. Schnider and Stenger, *Studien*, 71-75.

⁷⁹ On concluding elements in Hellenistic letters: Harry Gamble, *The Textual History of the Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 57-65; Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *Neglected Endings: The Significance of the Pauline Letter Closings* (JSNTSup 101; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994) 28-56.

⁸⁰ Cf. Weima, *Neglected Endings*, 145-148.

verbs relating to social interchange ("make known," "encourage," "read (aloud)," "greet," "tell," and so on) expands the meaning of the instruction in 3.8-17, 4.3-6, which identified the need for edifying speech and mutual support in the church. Additionally, the various greetings, commendations, and orders of the postscript reinforce the affirmation of Paul and his co-workers that had figured prominently in section I of the letter-body. As in the prescript, epistolary conventions are made to serve paraenetic functions, as the author encourages a trans-local forum for making and warranting moral decisions.

As for its literary structure, the unit is comprised of four paragraphs, distinguished by the type of information they convey. Anaphora and inclusio help to circumscribe the boundaries of these subunits.⁸¹ We have in 4.7-9 the official commendation of letter-bearers, Tychicus and Onesimus, who also function as apostolic envoys.⁸² The author's comments indicate both their good standing in the church and the purpose of their mission: they are to inform the Colossians of Paul's affairs and concerns, in effect validating the message of the epistle. The letter-writer indicates that the desired result of this activity is to "encourage your hearts" (4.8); comparison with 2.2 suggests that in so doing the envoys sustain and augment the work of the apostle himself.

In the second unit, 4.10-14, Paul extends greetings from six individuals in his company to the Colossian congregations.⁸³ The first three mentioned are Jewish-Christians (Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus-Justus) and the other three (Epaphras, Luke, and Demas) are gentile-Christians.⁸⁴ Chief among the fellow workers listed in the section is Epaphras, who is the subject of a glowing and relatively detailed testimonial (4.12-13, cf. 1.7-8). Paul certifies both Epaphras' good character and his good intentions as regards the readers. Like Paul, Epaphras struggles and prays on behalf of the Christians in the Lycus River valley in order that they may stand fully mature with respect to every aspect of God's will (cf. 1.3 ff., 9 ff., 1.28-2.2). Insofar

⁸¹ Inclusio (unit 1): τὰ κατ' ἐμὲ πάντα γνωρίσει ... (4.7) and πάντα ὑμῖν γνωρίσουσιν τὰ ὅδε (4.9b). For γνωρίζειν here cf. 1.27. Anaphora (units 2-4): ἀσπάζεται in 4.10, ἀσπάσασθε in 4.15, ὁ ἀσπασμός in 4.18.

⁸² Cf. Gamble, *Textual History*, 81, 84-87; Weima, *Neglected Endings*, 150-151.

⁸³ On epistolary greetings see BAGD 116-117; *TDNT* 1.496-502; Koskeniemi, *Studien*, 148-151; Gamble, *Textual History*, 59-60, 73-75; Schneider and Stenger, *Studien*, 126-131; Weima, *Neglected Endings*, 39-45, 104-117.

⁸⁴ The author adds in 4.11 a rather clumsily constructed note that these three are the only Jews (literally, those "of the circumcision," cf. 2.11) counted among Paul's associates, which is perhaps to be interpreted as an indirect jab at the legitimacy of the Jewish-Christian opponents.

as his character and activities overlap with those of the apostle, Epaphras appears to be recommended to the audience as a substitute for Paul himself.⁸⁵

The third unit, 4.15-17, transmits apostolic orders that specifically concern the Christian congregations in the neighboring city of Laodicea (cf. 2.1). Paul asks the readers to convey his greetings to the "brothers" in that city (cf. 1.1-2, 4.7, 9), particularly to the congregation that meets in the house of Nympha. He also instructs the Colossians to exchange the epistle they are now reading with another epistle ἐκ Λαοδικείας, which presumable refers to a letter written by Paul to that community.⁸⁶ The unit is rounded off with a directive for a certain Archippus, most likely a leader of the Christian movement in Laodicea. Paul entreats him to fulfill⁸⁷ the ministry (διακονία)⁸⁸ that he "received" in the Lord.⁸⁹

The fourth unit, 4.18, is the conclusion of the postscript and of the entire letter. "Paul" appends a handwritten greeting, intended in part to assure the audience of the document's apostolic origin.⁹⁰ Then there is a final appeal for the readers to remember Paul's suffering for the gospel (cf. 1.24, 4.3); the author's concluding wish is that the example of the apostolic struggle and witness remain in the minds of the readers. An epistolary benediction draws the letter to a close. The wish for "grace" here is reminiscent of the greeting that opened the letter in 1.2, forming an inclusio for the entire letter.⁹¹

⁸⁵ Barth, *Colossians*, 483. As Lohse (*Colossians*, 173) points out, the content of the prayer-report in 4.12 recalls the critique of the philosophy in chapter 2.

⁸⁶ Raymond F. Collins ("... that this letter be read to all the brethren." A New Testament Note," *LS* 9 (1982) 122-127) notes how the directive regarding the exchange of letters indicates the "extra-situational" character of Colossians.

⁸⁷ πληροῖς, cf. 1.25.

⁸⁸ This creates for the postscript something of an inclusio with διάκονος in v. 7.

⁸⁹ It is unclear whether this behest is intended as a warning (so, e.g., Lindemann, *Kolossierbrief*, 77) or as an encouraging reminder (so Gnllka, *Kolossierbrief*, 246-247; cf. Gamble, *Textual History*, 82-83). The placement of the command, after vv. 15-16, and the fact that Archippus is not addressed directly ("And tell Archippus ...") suggest that he belongs to the Laodicean community. On the meaning of παραλαμβάνειν (cf. 2.6) in this context cf. Zeilinger, "Träger," 185-188.

⁹⁰ On this practice: Gamble, *Textual History*, 62-64, 76-80; Schnider and Stenger, *Studien*, 135-167; Weima, *Neglected Endings*, 45-50, 118-135. In the Pauline corpus cf. I Corinthians 16.21, Galatians 6.11, II Thessalonians 3.17, Philemon 19.

⁹¹ On the practice of the concluding benediction see Gamble, *Textual History*, 65-67; Berger, "Apostelbrief," 204-207; Weima, *Neglected Endings*, 78-87.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing investigation has focused on the manner in which the author of Colossians endeavors to educate, encourage, and exhort the epistle's intended recipients so as to affect their religious beliefs and moral aspirations as a community of converts to Christianity, over against competing influences that might undermine their allegiance to the Pauline gospel and the growth they have experienced in the body of Christ. The central thesis guiding the study is that the ideas and methods that inform this manner of education are familiar especially from the conventions that were developing in moral philosophy at that time, in all its diversity. This sort of strategy would have been entirely appropriate given the pagan, Hellenized background of the audience and the Christian leaders (like Epaphras) who founded and guided their congregations. Like early Christianity, philosophic movements such as Stoicism, Epicureanism, Neoplatonism, Cynicism, and others sought from their initiates a personal "turning" – a moral transformation that accompanied a new intellectual and spiritual orientation. This would have entailed for the initiates an arduous and lifelong journey, fraught with distractions and pitfalls. In order to succeed, they required ongoing support, correction, and advice from the movement's recognized leaders.

In coming to terms with the literary categories and practices involved with the tutelage of philosophic converts experiencing this type of transformation, the manner of moral instruction identified in modern scholarship as paraenesis served as a critical pedagogical tool and mode of communication. In fact, comparative analysis indicates that it is accurate to speak of Colossians as an instance of epistolary paraenesis, not unlike comparable philosophic examples in terms of style, content, tactics, and objectives. Typically, philosophic paraenesis consists of an instructional speech delivered by an authoritative figure within a particular school, who functions as a teacher and mentor, explaining and validating the particular way of life endorsed by the movement's doctrinal system. The recipients, as novices in the movement, are at a liminal stage of development in terms of their appropriation and internalization of that way of life. The paraenetic author exhorts the addressees within the framework of a previously-shaped and all-encompassing explanation of reality, which can be referred to as the movement's worldview or symbolic

universe. In this capacity, the speech will assume certain ideas regarding divinity, the nature of the cosmos, the human condition, the structures of power and status in human civilization, and so on. By and large, though, pertinent doctrinal issues that may undergird the exhortation of a paraenetic document are simply implied or conveyed in abbreviated form, shorthand reminders rather than detailed explanations. In addition, the worldview assumptions advocated by a paraenetic writer are ordinarily expressed in terms that interact critically with the wisdom of other worldviews. This indicates for students what the ideology of their movement shares with the broader culture, highlighting its own ideas of human purpose, ethics, and so on vis-à-vis the values associated with the outside world, from which the neophytes are separating themselves.

Given these qualities of paraenesis in general, and of Colossians in particular, it is possible to describe individually each of the major characters or "elements" who figure in the paraenetic exchange insofar as the manner in which they are presented buttresses the overall objectives that typify this variety of discourse. In the most basic terms, these elements include the author (in the first-person), the recipients (in the second-person), and the major figures to whom the author refers in the course of the speech (in the third-person).

To begin with, the author of Colossians (ostensibly the apostle Paul) is presented according to categories that exhibit significant affinities with those employed by philosophic educators in their own self-description. Through the words and concepts of the epistle and the manner of their delivery, Paul emerges as an authoritative teacher of truth and wisdom, an upright servant of God who leads others to ultimate realities and to the best course for human flourishing. Paul functions as a mystagogue, one who divulges divine secrets, mediating a special revelation which informs the teachings that he hands down to his followers and which capacitates his own apostolic labor. Furthermore, Paul struggles mightily as a devoted sage who suffers for the benefit of others. The integrity of his *ἀγών* proves divine power and love to be working in him personally, strengthening his resolve and character. Enduring adversity for the church, then, becomes a cause for his rejoicing. Since he has been called and empowered by God to proclaim the gospel to the world, Paul is presented also as an embodiment of what he teaches, an exemplar for others to emulate, especially in his faithfulness, endurance, love, and thanksgiving to God, all in the name of the Lord. In this Paul can also be reckoned from the readers' point of view as a friend, a brother in Christ, someone who is trustworthy, open and frank as to their shortcomings, but truly interested and active as to their ultimate

well-being, their standing before God. Although physically absent, he upholds the authentic Christian life of the community in the spirit and via his written communications.

The manner in which the readers, the Colossian Christians, are depicted and addressed is likewise cast in categories that approximate those found in Hellenistic moral philosophy. These categories have to do with practices and procedures developed in association with the guidance of converts. As we have seen, ideas and methods applicable to the process of conversion could work profoundly on the minds of neophytes even long after the event of conversion itself, as they matured within the movement and realized the full potential of their turning to a new course in life. The most striking images that the reader of Colossians encounters – images of transfer, of being rescued from one realm to another, of dying and being raised, of putting off the old person and putting on the new, of obeying a new and divine Lord – convey powerfully both the contrast between the Colossians' Christian and pre-Christian modes of existence as well as that between the character of life they observe as a Christian community and that which is observable in the outside world. The challenge for the addressees now, as the author sees things, is to maintain and habituate their new status through moral conduct. In the language of the author, this means remaining secure, steadfast, and unshifting in their faith. This includes the expectation of an eschatological revelation by God of what is now known and certain, but still hidden "in Christ."

The epistle to the Colossians, as paraenesis, is meant to address this challenge of growing in Christ morally, of living the life given in baptism. The primary objective of the text's instruction, though, surfaces not in the effort to impart anything new or to chart a fresh course to which the Colossian Christians should aspire, but rather to rouse their memory as to what they already know they should do, engage their attention regarding the business at hand, help locate priorities in a demanding situation, and encourage the recipients to conform their actions to their convictions at this and every opportunity. The text plainly concerns itself with moral decision-making and practical comportment, with the palpable moral progress of its audience as evidenced in day-to-day situations. As paraenesis, Colossians calls upon its readers to ponder the significance of their prior personal commitments as they bear upon a current controversy and act accordingly. Thus the author conveys material that is for the most part already familiar to the recipients, material expressing concepts and rules commonly accepted within the movement, as opposed to concentrating on novel or debatable issues. So from the audience's

perspective what is said appears to be self-evident and uncontroversial, rendering lengthy arguments unnecessary. Indeed, many of the norms articulated in Colossians are predicated upon widely accepted ideas in society as to what constitutes the moral individual and citizen.

This all reflects how basic the task of remembrance is to paraenetic agendas, as neophytes are encouraged to bring to mind ideas and lessons of the past and to consolidate them so as to make them relevant to the formulation of present strategies. While this process of remembrance and reappropriation could take on complex and varying characteristics in the corpus of ancient paraenesis as a whole, our letter-writer, like most paraenetic authors, displays an interest in recalling and applying in particular four components of the new life: (1) remembrance of what conversion had accomplished or should have accomplished for one's personal direction; (2) remembrance of the movement's fundamental teachings, creeds, conventions, and so forth, what the initiates had learned during and since conversion; (3) remembrance of the teachers who had facilitated conversion and provided nurturing in accordance with the tenets of the movement; (4) remembrance of one's experiences within the movement since conversion, both positive and negative, and on the nature of one's growth as a convert.

Because paraenesis is meant to facilitate the task of abstracting and justifying pertinent aspects of the novices' new worldview as they inform practical issues of moral conduct, this process of remembrance and reappropriation will necessarily take on a theological cast. In fact, the starting point and primary criterion for shaping any symbolic universe consist in premises regarding the nature of divinity, the divinely-instituted or divinely-sanctioned order of the cosmos, and the spiritual and moral relationship of human reality to divine reality. Examined from the perspective of worldview, then, it would be fair to say that all ideas regarding moral identity, purpose, and obligation in a paraenetic context relate directly or indirectly to theological assumptions. The presentation of such assumptions, however, is ordinarily undertaken by way of succinct references to particular teachings, symbols, events, and formulae associated with the neophytes' previous learning, not through a methodical treatment of doctrinal matters. As for purpose, theological assumptions in paraenesis reveal, among other things, the ultimate power and wisdom that inform the types of behavioral and cognitive patterns recommended, patterns that frame one's understanding of moral order and worth. Inasmuch as Colossians conveys theological reminders and manipulates theological traditions as part of the larger enterprise of moral

exhortation, it resembles a host of paraenetic texts from contemporaneous philosophic circles, which often take on a decidedly religious character. Indeed, in the case of Colossians, we witness a highly developed and rather sophisticated christology, which concentrates on soteriological affirmations, many of which appear to be designed to counter the tenets of the opposition, the Colossian philosophy. Assurances as to Christ's divine fullness, his preeminence over the *stoicheia*, the cosmic reconciliation that God has accomplished through and for him, and the new life of forgiveness made available for those who are "in" him, in the body of which he is the head, underscore the transforming power of the gospel for human nature and destiny. God's victory through Christ is depicted as one accomplished especially for humanity, particularly for the church, Christ's body, whose corporate life is characterized by thankfulness to God and the pursuit of conduct that is worthy of their new Lord.

At the same time, the author's religious and moral instructions are formulated antithetically, a feature that is indicative of the clash of opposing forces and perspectives that is foundational to the articulation of worldview in a paraenetic context. For paraenetic writers it is necessary to assist initiates as they establish ethical boundaries that are serviceable for their own life choices, as they determine case by case what is acceptable and what is not within the parameters of their ideology. Often it is in the midst of novices' experience of contention regarding the interpretation of their symbolic universe or specific perceived anomalies in that universe that its acknowledged qualities and practical meaning come into relief most clearly. This fact demands also of the audience of a paraenetic document an informed and concrete alignment with one explanation of reality as opposed to another and a decision as to how the anomalies of the accepted worldview are to be reconciled in the arena of real decision-making. In a paraenetic setting such as that of Colossians, references to elements of a presupposed symbolic universe are not carried out in a neutral, academic manner, but are put forth always with a view to the normative quality that the symbolic universe can have for personal formation and moral commitment.

It is in the light cast by these observations that we can see most clearly how the manner of Paul's interaction with the philosophy compares on a number of fronts with the strategies evident in paraenesis of critiquing rival philosophers and harmful superstitions. Three broad and interrelated categories of correction operate in the epistle, all of which evidence the letter-writer's attempt to expose the inherent contradictions that plague the errorists' doctrines and operation. First, the author wants to attribute to the opposition mistaken

opinions regarding the nature of the divine and the nature of the relationship between the realm of the divine and that of human affairs. This would relate in particular to their understanding of Christ and the implications of the Christ-event for human existence. The author contends that they have either neglected or denied the full meaning of what God has accomplished through Christ, revealing an ignorance of the wide-ranging ramifications of conversion (baptism) for the new Christian life. Instead, they have assigned misguided importance to the *stoicheia*, unnecessarily and incorrectly viewing the divine as hostile or indifferent to the plight of humankind. Second, the author castigates the opposition's faulty convictions as to the character of worship and the general effect and intention of religious practices. The errorists attach religious significance to aspects of life (such as observing certain holy days or certain ascetic rules) where it is both inappropriate theologically and harmful to the welfare of the community. Their religious code, then, is nothing but a human fabrication predicated upon worldly standards and egotism. In conjunction with this, they have misunderstood and undermined the value of authentic Christian rituals (especially baptism), traditions (like the Christ-hymn), and teachings (such as the traditional materials incorporated into 3.4-4.1). Third, we detect a negative judgment of the disruptive effects that these ideas and practices have for the morality of the faithful and for the harmony of the Christian congregations involved. The author condemns the practices of the philosophy in part because they threaten the moral standards and social cohesion of the audience. The false teachers are depicted as vain and judgmental hypocrites whose deceptive powers of argumentation are used to debauch others. This indicates the sensual and materialistic orientation of their religion. In confronting harmful concepts, the author, in a manner consistent with prevailing paraenetic objectives, not only critiques the concepts themselves, but takes into consideration as part of the polemic a critical evaluation of the dispositions and habits of those individuals who espouse such concepts, particularly in their moral dimensions.

As these observations suggest, the individual characters or "elements" who figure prominently in both the paraenetic exchange and the worldview of Colossians hardly operate in isolation from one another. Rather, an important facet of the text as paraenesis surfaces in its apparent efforts to show how these elements fit together coherently to form the letter-writer's particular version of Christian reality, a reality that is meant to reflect palpably the life-situation of the audience. One of the ways in which this enterprise manifests itself is in what we have called the text's narrative substructure. In promoting a

particular symbolic universe in conjunction with its paraenetic function, *Colossians* refers its readers to a story that articulates that universe and fixes their place in it. Any effective worldview, it seems, must be articulated through and embodied in a story or stories to some extent. The construction of a worldview generally demands that this world exhibit some narrative dimension, a feature that lends to the worldview shape and focus, and demonstrates how it relates concretely to the lives, experiences, history, and expectations of people who are themselves living out a kind of "story." Among other factors, the narrative drive behind a comprehensive explanation of reality shows how the basic forces and institutions and events that it comprises work themselves out and interact in the arena of human experience. The stories that are constituent of a worldview, then, like worldview itself, are in principle normative. In the case of *Colossians*, as with other paraenetic materials, it is not the author's intention that his narrative communication be examined in some hypothetical or detached way. Rather the value-claims asserted by the text through its story are meant to elicit from the readership a decision that is sufficient for determining self-identity and ultimate commitments. This is an essential way in which the text calls on the recipients to exercise practical reasoning in evaluating and acting upon its arguments and recommendations. In terms of the narrational aspects of the document, this decision-making process entails for the reader embracing the story provided by the author as a controlling story over all other stories.

As for the substance of its narrative substructure, it appears that in *Colossians* we have not one but three interrelated stories or story lines. The first has to do with the "external" characters of the plot (God, Christ, and the cosmic powers), the second with the "internal" characters (the members of the Colossian community), and the third with the purported author, Paul himself. A critical inspection of *Colossians*' narrative substructure according to the "actantial" model first developed by A.J. Greimas reveals a number of its key features. Most importantly, it is evident that the text's worldview is determined to a significant extent by how its major elements are defined and related to one another either by contract or confrontation, and by how these contracts and confrontations are resolved. In terms of this model, the hallmarks of the story promoted by the epistle's symbolic universe appear in the identification of three divine mandates and the delineation of how these mandates function together in a logical way: God accomplishes reconciliation through the cross of Christ, Paul is commissioned by God to proclaim the gospel, the readers are called by God to be baptized and to live the gospel.

All three contracts are initiated by God, all three relate to the revelation of God's mystery, and all three advance God's cosmic plan of victory and redemption. All three involve God's contracting with a protagonist, each with a distinct mission and a distinct sphere of operation. Each protagonist must overcome an opposition associated with the cosmic elements and their power over human beings. For each protagonist a "Helper" can be identified, in accordance with the divine plan.

Accordingly, we can observe how this narrative structure, based upon contract and conflict, furnishes a framework for evaluating all elements and actions that occur in its story. As the letter-readers are engaged in the process of recognizing this underlying scheme for explaining reality, they are able to observe in their own local, particular story certain universal principles of ultimate importance, principles which must become the raw material of their own self-identity and moral purpose if they are to succeed. Colossians fashions a narrative consciousness for its readers that assists them in bridging in their own experience the events and received wisdom of the past with the present situation of decision making, all with a view to the response that their future in Christ demands. In this endeavor, the person and teaching of the apostle function in a critical capacity especially insofar as Paul, in fulfilling his contract, links the cosmic, divine order of things (the "external" story) with the local, social order of the recipients (the "internal" story).

It must be emphasized that, since it is a paraenetic document, this narrative structure for Colossians is an aspect of its communication that has to be abstracted from the text. It functions only on the presuppositional level in terms of how it bears the author's symbolic universe and the norms associated with it. At the level of the text's explicit message or argument, the reader encounters the different elements of the paraenetic exchange and the underlying story in which they function in a decidedly more express and pointed fashion, in literary and rhetorical terms, as part of the direct communication of the text. The manner in which the letter-writer has shaped his message to the readers and the criteria that govern its literary composition (appropriate to its genre as a paraenetic letter) guide the presentation and application of its moral story and moral appeal in fundamental ways. If any story is to operate for its readership in something like a controlling or normative mode, it requires continuous checking in the light of the readers' actual experiences and vis-à-vis their wider symbolic universe in the form of a sort of verification process. Colossians, as befits its paraenetic nature, addresses this process of updating and verification, and the way that it does so is

evident above all in the principles selected by the author to design his literary creation, the way in which the story is interpreted and applied in this particular instance of moral guidance.

As for the details of this design, it appears that the literary conventions observed by the author of *Colossians* in shaping the message are comparable to those at work in the paraenetic literature of moral philosophy. Specifically, aside from its epistolary framework, *Colossians* manifests a three-part literary structure, with 1.3-2.7 functioning as paraenetic affirmation, 2.8-23 as paraenetic correction, and 3.1-4.6 as paraenetic exhortation. Each of these three basic types or "modes" of paraenetic address corresponds in its own way to an underlying aim of philosophic education in a paraenetic context. Working together, they represent and address the fundamental areas of concern to which a moral director must tend when instructing and encouraging neophytes, comprising a coordinated strategy for spiritual leadership, relating the foundational components of worldview and worldview stories in a deliberate fashion.

To conclude: in formulating a response to the sort of difficult situation that confronted the congregations of the Lycus River region, our author must have had a number of different options available, all of which would have belonged to the prevailing customs and precedents of the religious, moral, and literary culture in Hellenistic times. Our comparative study of *Colossians* in the light of the traditions of ancient moral philosophy has suggested in explicit terms the sort of criteria that must have been at work as the author critically selected, devised, and applied his theological message. The indication is that he participates in specific and contemporaneous conventions governing moral education and exhortation such as those also reflected in the philosophic materials, and that the activity of the text's theology is directed at least partly in accordance with and in order to meet expectations associated with these sorts of conventions. Presumably, the pseudepigrapher felt that this strategy would be appropriate both to his Pauline heritage and to the exigencies of the Colossian situation. So while the impetus for our letter comes from the threat of a certain "philosophy and empty deceit," the author's response (from literary, rhetorical, and material standpoints) does not consist primarily of polemic, but speaks to the broader themes of authentic Christian existence, its practical implications, and the basic rationale that grounds Christian morality. For the letter-writer, assessing and responding to the current issue of Christian living involves the creative appropriation and reconstruction of the wisdom of the past, the traditions associated with the Pauline gospel. The specific characteristics of the situation addressed by the letter

orientate the recovery of this knowledge, which is carried out with an eye to the need to persuade, so as to direct thought and action towards a particular type of personal transformation. Yet the transformation under consideration is by no means simply personal. This process of reappropriation exhibits critical reflection on the status, place, and destiny of the readers both as a Christian community and as participants in a complex, non-Christian society. Thus all issues of moral growth and guidance are assumed to be matters that the Colossians endorse and realize as members of Christ's body. At the same time, Colossians correlates the foundations of its symbolic universe, its theological assumptions, and its moral recommendations with questions shaped by non-Christian aspects of experience and practice, the errorists in particular and the "outside" world in general. Like all instances of ancient paraenesis, the letter presupposes a reasoned accounting for the social and intellectual contexts in which the amended life is to be observed.

Our examination of Colossians as paraenesis has been of special value in appreciating the decidedly and fully practical orientation of its theology. The theology of the text does not reside abstractly in a system of beliefs or affirmations or stories, but is evident only as it informs the moral conduct and decision-making of its readers in specific ways. As we have seen, it was agreed in philosophic circles that neophytes must ratify through their everyday comportment their initial commitment to the life and teachings of the movement, maintaining and habituating their new status. Those to whom paraenesis is directed, like the Colossian Christians, already accept the authority of their teacher and the validity of his ideology and worldview, but lack direction and consistency in the actualization of their beliefs, wherein lies their verification. The readers of the epistle need encouragement as they overcome doubt, fear, and specific obstacles in realizing Christ in their lives. For the author, the primary source of theological wisdom is the knowledge of God. But, as the formulation of Colossians 1.9-10 illustrates, this wisdom can hardly be called esoteric, theoretical, or speculative in nature. Rather, it calls upon the wise to lead a specific sort of life that is worthy of their divine calling, expressed in the gospel. As the knowledge of God is made real in life, as it is recognized in the practices that guide life, then Christians grow in that very knowledge. The starting-point, then, for the author's theological reflection is action: theological statements find their meaning as they arise out of and return to concrete challenges of living which are of immediate concern to those who adhere to such statements. In this sense, the readers are to understand each of their moral practices and dispositions as value-laden, as expressive

of values corresponding to the *nomos* posited by their Christian worldview. All of the author's practical thinking, then, contains a vision of the purpose of life (even if this vision remains mostly latent), a critical appropriation of reality formulated so as to guide and shape the readers as they recognize and actualize their Christian identity.

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